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Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and the Populist Tradition in Presidential Rhetoric

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RONALD REAGAN, BILL CLINTON, AND THE POPULIST TRADITION IN
PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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Abstract

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Populism is one of the most ambiguous terms in rhetorical scholarship. It can be a political strategy, a genuine reflection of personality, a deep manipulation of core American values, and much more. Political pundits have used it as a descriptive term, and on occasion as an insult. Some have deemed the concept's flexibility confusing and even counterproductive, which sparked an interest in studying what is meant when analysts and scholars address political speakers as populist. This thesis examines populism in detail, by analyzing the rhetoric of former presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Two questions drove the research: (1) What do people mean when they label a politician as populist? (2) Is this an illuminating descriptor? The research found that that populism's ambiguity contributes to its utility; however, it is also essential that critics, writers, and others who use the term do so carefully in order to clarify their intent.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“The 2016 presidential campaign is just getting underway, but so far one message seems clear: populism’s moment has arrived.”¹ The claim that this political strategy may reach a pinnacle moment in the 2016 campaign reflects what has now become a routine analysis of the candidates running for office– they are populists. Although this may seem like a broad brush with which to paint platforms that pride themselves in being in opposition, it is one that has increased in use as the election draws closer. Comparisons of presidential hopefuls as diverse as conservative Republican Mike Huckabee and liberal Independent-Democrat-Socialist Bernie Sanders frequent news stories that claim this type of rhetoric is now necessary to get the increasingly prominent “anti-establishment” vote.² Some journalists blame not the establishment, but rather international threats, as the cause of this political trend, stating that right-leaning politicians across the world (e.g. Donald J. Trump, Marine Le Pen in France, and Viktor Orban in Hungary) are turning towards populism in response to “a climate of insecurity rivaling the period after the First World War.”³

While trying to determine what causes this rhetoric globally may be a fruitful area for additional research, what is of more interest in this project is the rise of political pundits who are labeling nearly everyone in the American 2016 presidential race as populist. What is this term supposed to convey? What do the journalists and political analysts mean when they designate one person or another as populist? The fact that both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump fit under this banner may say more about populism as a concept than about either person as a politician. Examining the justifications authors give for using this label is revealing. Scott Beauchamp of *The Atlantic* states that “it is Clinton’s heightened awareness of mundane commonalities that defines her version of populism.”⁴ Yet, according to National Public Radio’s

Mara Liasson, “Trump fits right into the classic tradition of American populism,” which she states, “has always combined nativism with economic grievance.”⁵ Given these contrasting definitions, readers seem left to decide if populism is being aware of commonalities a leader has with the people, if it is full of racist/classist undertones, or perhaps both. The problem with these claims, then, becomes that multiple candidates in 2016 have caused recurring use of the term populism, yet the term has no clear—or, at least, no universally accepted—denotation.

The regularity of this descriptor regarding the rhetorical habits of supposedly antithetical politicians in the 2016 campaign, thus, is an area of study that is particularly rich in this election season. However, it is not a phenomenon which has only recently arisen. Rather, populism has been an important trend in American politics since as early as 1890.⁶ Given this, a useful course of action to understand how this concept works is not to study current campaigners, but instead to assess past candidates who rose to the presidency. This choice is primarily due to the array of research on Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, two politically divergent former presidents whose rhetoric often reflected surprisingly marked similarities. These politicians have a rich history of being studied rhetorically, one that is significant enough to provide a solid basis from which to begin analysis. They were both labeled populist, though for different reasons. Their tactics of persuasion exemplify not only each president’s communicative habits, but variants of populism itself. Exploring populist appeals in two twentieth century presidents’ oratory may help illuminate how populism functions in contemporary politics.

This chapter unfolds in four distinct parts. First, the purpose and rationale of the study are more fully explicated, in order to establish the project’s potential utility. A literature review which primarily addresses populism then follows. This foundation is imperative to assist in comprehending what this concept might be used to reference when employed in the rest of the

project. Providing a general base for how genuinely confusing the term can be allows for the analysis of Presidents Reagan and Clinton in chapters two and three to be as fruitful as possible. An account of the texts chosen for this study follows the literature review, where the documents are both identified and explained. After the reasoning for choosing these texts is in place, the method of analysis describes how this project proceeds in order to answer the questions posited. The study's goal is both to know more about Reagan and Clinton as populist rhetors and to understand populism more fully through their example.

Purpose and Rationale

What does it mean to call a political figure a populist? Moreover, in what ways is the label meaningful? Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, political scientists trained in Europe who focus on populism, introduce the breadth of the term as follows:

One of the most used and abused terms inside and outside of academia is undoubtedly *populism*. At times it seems that almost every politician, at least those we do not like, is a populist. The term has been applied to both Venezuelan left-wing president Hugo Chavez and American right-wing vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, and to both the radical left Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and the radical right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). It has also been hailed as a way to include the underclass and scorned as a programme to exclude minorities. No wonder some authors have called for the abandonment of the use of the allegedly meaningless term (e.g. Roxborough 1984).⁷

Populism is one of the most ambiguous terms in rhetorical scholarship. Despite the call for abandonment, however, over forty years later its use is no less prevalent. For being often used, and rarely agreed upon, it is at the very least polysemous. The presence of multiple

possible definitions, though, does not detract from its significance as a lens through which to view political rhetoric. Paul Taggart, a prolific scholar on the subject, states that “it is hard to understand politics in the United States without having some sense of populism.”⁸ Even so, it has received surprisingly inadequate treatment. Taggart adds that “for such a commonly used term, it is surprising how little attention populism has received as a concept.”⁹ As one might imagine, frequently using language that is this flexible has the potential to create considerable misunderstanding. Clarifying what people mean when they call leaders populist seems essential to sustaining a functional concept. If men as different as Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton can be labeled populist for sometimes opposing reasons, the idea would appear to lose explanatory power.

Given the term’s ambiguity, two foundational questions motivate this research. Both stem from observing the rhetoric often characteristic of the 2016 presidential candidates’ campaigns. The first is, what do people mean when they use the term populist to describe a candidate? Due to the fact that the same word can describe radically different politicians it is fair to state that it may raise more questions than answers. If Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are both populist, what does that mean? Is it the case that the candidates are more alike than initially assumed? Alternatively, is it the case instead that journalists, politicians, and the general public take advantage of populism’s elasticity?

According to Gary C. Woodward, populism is elastic in that “Populist imagery has been exploited by a wide range of incompatible interests,” and has become “a vehicle for political mystification.” Woodward believes that past presidents have used a type of pseudo-populism which pretends to serve public interests while in reality “serving what may be very private interests indeed.”¹⁰ The claim that populist rhetoric serves personal interests, is fake, is elite in

itself, or is deceptive, however, is not helpful when trying to discern why certain politicians gain that label. This project focuses not on the quality of populism defined by the public sphere in 2016. By evaluating two relatively recent presidents known for their persuasive skills, though, readers may gain an appreciation for populism which helps to frame today's political speech.

Whatever the answer to this first question, it leads directly to the second: To what extent, if any, is populism illuminating as a descriptor? If anyone can be a populist for a multitude of reasons, it is possible that this label actually tells us very little. It is also possible that the call to abandon the term populism is the best option for rhetorical scholarship. On the other hand, it might be the case that the elasticity of populism is extremely useful. The multiple, sometimes opposing, uses of the concept allow authors to understand politics in a more nuanced way by providing contextual wiggle-room when describing candidates. Simply because a word does not have a fixed denotation does not suggest that it is worthless. According to Peter Wiles, "all descriptively useful definitions are frayed at the edges. Framed so as to coincide with the natural divisions of the real world, rather than with logical constructs, they will and should fail to cope with existing exceptions."¹¹ In Wiles' view, a useful term *should* have a flexible definition. The question then becomes, now that we can see populism as ambiguous, does this make it more or less helpful or illuminating to the rhetorical scholar?

Thus, the problem that must be addressed is the obscurity in the term populism. In order to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of this term, and of the rhetoric often espoused in the 2016 presidential campaigns, this project researched particular texts of Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Although this may be perplexing initially, the choice of these two former presidents can assist in furthering an understanding of populism. Clinton and Reagan both won their campaigns using rhetoric deemed populist for different reasons. Both men ran

campaigns that were contemporary for their times and neither sought the title of “populist,” an abundance of research is available on both presidents’ rhetoric, and they were in opposing political parties. For these reasons, examining their rhetoric may reveal useful insights into populism’s recurrence as a theme and as a descriptor in political discourse.

One important discovery about populism pervasive in the literature regards its immense flexibility, though journalists who employ the term regarding the 2016 election often discuss it as if it is fixed. Mara Liasson, for instance, declared that populism “has always combined nativism with economic grievance.”¹² However, this is not always the case. Rather, the term is remarkably adaptable. Saying that “populism is” any one thing necessarily omits this dimension. A rhetorical style such as this can further a great cause, or it may be used as a trick to deceive the people. It can be classist, racist, or bigoted—but it can also be used in a message of kindness, optimism, and reform. The reality of these differences is demonstrated when such dissimilar public figures as Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, and Mike Huckabee can be labeled as populist rhetors. A prominent scholar on the subject, Michael J. Lee, has even depicted populism as a “chameleon.”¹³ Thus, a study that aims to contribute to understanding the term more thoroughly is in order.

Literature Review

This project aspires to understand what populist rhetoric is, how it is elastic, and whether or not it is valuable. In order to do that, a next step is to understand where it sits within current scholarship. Thus, a literature review becomes necessary. Looking at the history of populism in America, as well as at how different rhetorical scholars have defined the term over time, provides a more complete understanding of the concept. This, in turn, assists in answering the questions leading the research completed over the course of this project. The primary purpose of

this literature review is to have an understanding of populism so that current knowledge informs the analysis that follows.

Despite varied applications and interpretations, populist political speech has discernible roots in nineteenth-century oratory. This rhetorical category gained momentum as a movement over one hundred years after the founding of the United States. Thomas R. Burkholder explains that a pinnacle period in the evolution of populism began in Kansas in 1890 and 1892.¹⁴ The People's Party, the official name of the populist movement, broke "the Republican domination of Kansas politics" by using "populist orators who implemented rhetorical strategies grounded in what scholars have called the agrarian myth."¹⁵ Many of these orators were politicians who "sought to unite all members of the 'productive classes' in the crusade against the 'money power.'"¹⁶ Two revealing examples include William Peffer and Lorenzo D. Lewelling. Peffer was the chairman of one of the early conventions, and a U.S. Senator from Kansas, who believed that once this "coalition of the people" formed, it could not be stopped.¹⁷ Lewelling was a Governor of Kansas who "cast the yeoman as hero, abused by the evil money power."¹⁸ According to Burkholder, these orators and their supporters "attempted to transcend ideological difference by appealing to traditional American values grounded in the agrarian myth."¹⁹

For a short time, this movement experienced marked success. It helped define populism and bring it to the forefront of American consciousness. Politicians uniting people from all perspectives of political culture against a particular group of wealthy elites continues—or has the appearance of continuing—today as a form of populism. However, within two years of the 1892 election, this movement failed in Kansas. As Burkholder writes, "by 1894 the populist orators who had been so successful just two years earlier were routed as the coalition fell apart and Republicans regained control of state government in Kansas."²⁰ Although the movement directly

affected only a few years of politics in Kansas, the rhetoric birthed here continued to evolve. This moment in American political history, at the least, solidified a particular style of speaking to persuade a generalized public as “populist.” Additionally, the rise and fall of the movement in Kansas “left an important legacy to later reformers. . . .”²¹

One rhetorical definition of populism typical since this period explains that it is used by the elite when speaking to the mass public and is “directed at denying and obscuring [their] elitism.”²² Political communication scholars Michael Weiler and W. Barnett Pearce offer this particular description. Their definition dictates that when elite rhetors attempt to relate to the general public, speakers’ language necessarily obscures their place in society. The discourse aims to suggest that someone who is economically and/or socially better off than most is “just like you.” In this view, populist rhetoric is “an essential feature of ideology in the negative sense, of a false political consciousness based on the obscuring of class differences.”²³ In judging populism as a whole, Weiler and Pearce are not entirely fair in this definition. They at least imply that all populist rhetoric is inherently deceitful. However, if the basis one has for this style of speaking is the populist movement, as one can argue it should be, it is clear that populism did not originate with the elite. The political movement from which populism was born did not consist of the rich attempting to create an identity with, and to secure the trust of, the general public. It is important to note instead that this definition reflects an incomplete view of populism’s origins when it is attributed primarily to rhetors like Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump.

Huey Long, in contrast, is an excellent example of a populist leader who eschewed elitism. Further, he used this style in a way that is nearly universally agreed upon as valuable to his community. When scholars state that Long was a populist leader, they are saying something

meaningful about his campaign and his time in office. The Louisiana Senator and Governor of the 1920s-1930s was born to a middle-class family, not as an aristocrat.²⁴ Long used his roots to begin a political movement to help the struggling within his community, with whom he sincerely identified, as well as in order to get votes. His ideas were not meant only to make him famous or well liked, but to enact change in the government. In his version of populism, the goal was to make “Every Man a King,” his slogan in the 1928 gubernatorial campaign.²⁵ In fact, rather than reflecting elitism many of Long’s ideas about politics stemmed from the reality that he was not a man of wealth or privilege. According to Alan Brinkley, a prolific American History scholar at Columbia University, “Long emerged from a region of Louisiana that had for decades felt itself on the periphery of the state economy and at odds with the state political oligarchy; his original constituents were men and women who had, for generations, considered themselves powerless and voiceless.”²⁶ In this environment, Long’s brand of populism flourished. He stood with the people and created an “us” vs. “them” identity with his constituents. The Kingfish—Long’s nickname—demonstrated populism’s ability to shift from its agrarian roots in Kansas to a struggle between the working class and the wealthy.²⁷

Despite examples like Long and the People’s Party in Kansas, rhetorical scholarship continued to depict populism in a negative light. Howard S. Erlich, for instance, states that populism is sometimes equated with “anti-ism,” where “the trick is simply not to be *for* anything but ‘the little people’ and to be *against* almost everything.”²⁸ The movement of populism was originally radical, as with Huey Long and his “Share the Wealth” campaign. In the twenty-first century, it is a rhetorical strategy adopted by the left and right alike. The agrarian roots of populism in Kansas called to different interest groups and pitted them against “the system” and the affluent. Populist rhetoric resonated with people from such different walks of life as

“disgruntled farmers, urban industrial laborers and trade unionists, dissident Republicans and Democrats, prohibitionists, woman suffragists, Greenbackers, Single Taxers, and other reformers of every stripe.”²⁹

However, the use of this style has evolved since its inception. Peter Worsley, a noted British sociologist and anthropologist, states that populism has since been used to describe any movement invoking the people. The populist net, he maintains, is “wide enough to include right-wing as well as left-wing variants . . . [and is now found] in developed societies as well as in those standing on the threshold of modernization, in the towns as well as the country-side, amongst workers and middle classes as well as among peasants.”³⁰ Thus, the potential for use, or conceivably misuse, has risen dramatically from populism’s late nineteenth century origins in Kansas. Peter Wiles, an economist and Sovietologist who claimed his own “lack of special knowledge embolden[ed]” him to generalize about populism, concluded, “to each his (sic) own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds.”³¹

The remnants of the movement of The People’s Party can be seen even in late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century society. These remnants, however, do not often flow recognizably from nineteenth century Kansas and what the original movement portrayed. Populism in contemporary American political discourse thus is hard to define. A brief glance at the movement’s history and evolution reveals more questions than answers. Is it invariably deceitful, as Weiler and Pearce imply? Does ‘real’ populism necessarily take the motives of the actor into account at all? Is populism just being against everything? Does populist rhetoric have to benefit, at least eventually, the common man? Do all scholars who invoke the use of populism do so only under their biases? As has been shown thus far, “populism” and “populist” recur in descriptions of the 2016 campaigns, and the terms have occupied the attention of disciplinary and

interdisciplinary scholars. The questions that the story of populism raises segue to the questions that are the foundation of this study: What do people mean when they use the term populism? Is the term illuminating?

It seems fair to hold that populism is polysemous. However, even given the concept's multiple variations or senses, five key themes repeat themselves in the literature:

- (1) Populist rhetoric transcends political ideology.
- (2) Populist rhetoric eschews the elite status of the speaker.
- (3) Populist rhetoric can be a pattern of the working class versus the wealthy or privileged political class.
- (4) Populist rhetoric often reflects a style of "anti-ism."
- (5) Populism is any movement involving "the people."

Burkholder revealed that populism transcends political ideology by explaining how it began in America. The root of populism consists of politicians who transcended dogmatism in order to bring together people from diverse backgrounds to fight against the wealthy, powerful classes. They did this by using the agrarian myth. While the agrarian myth might still hold persuasive power, the twentieth century myth of the American Dream is one which Reagan and Clinton rely on more heavily when making populist appeals. When presidential rhetors use references to the American Dream to de-emphasize political ideologies, they reverse the origins of populist rhetoric in the United States.

Weiler and Pearce explain that populist rhetoric can obscure the elite status of the speaker; indeed, too often such obscurity is its intention. This style of speech can allow those of decidedly higher classes to attempt to relate to people in far different life circumstances. Stories of being disadvantaged in childhood illustrate how this theme manifests itself in political

rhetoric. In the case of Ronald Reagan, Weiler and Pearce point out his repetitive use of his “radio sportscasting career of ‘Dutch’” as one example of his attempt to use his past to relate to people in the present.³² Although Reagan was decidedly upper-class for the majority of his adult life, his discourse worked to hide this fact and make him appear more working- or lower-class.

Populist rhetoric using the pattern of the working class versus the wealthy or political class is best exemplified in the case of Huey Long. The working or lower classes make up one side of the dichotomy he portrayed—and they are often depicted as fighting for the basic necessities of a better life. The other side has historically been “the wealthy,” but as more and more politicians have incomes that figure into millions, this group might also be called the “political class.” The working class perceives the political class as the people in control. Rhetoric that fits this description of populist would imply the inherent opposition between these two groups. This clash between the classes also refers to the anti-establishment vote that is growing and is supposedly coveted by politicians like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (ironically, a career politician). Sanders’ “laser-like focus on inequality” is a quintessential working class versus political elite, anti-establishment position.³³

A fourth theme of populist rhetoric, adapted from Erlich, is a style of “anti-ism.” This broad conception envisions populism as against “everything but the people.” Hypothetically, a statement that reflects anti-ism in a populist manner is one that says something like, “because I represent the people, I am against _____,” where the blank can be anything. This catch-all reproach of everything that might be demonized in politics helps to solidify the idea of being on the side of the people. Donald Trump, for example, is against abortion, rent control, gay marriage, corporate taxes, common core, and more.³⁴ It would not be a stretch to say his populist appeals focus more on what he is against than what he is for. George Packer, a journalist for *The*

New Yorker, describes Trump's tack as "playing the game of anti-politics," employed earlier by others as George Wallace, Ross Perot, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and even Barack Obama.³⁵

The last of the five themes, perhaps the broadest of all, is that populism is any movement involving the people. At least as extensive as anti-ism, this view of populist rhetoric sees it as any attempt to persuade people to work together. This perspective may turn out to be the most contested, as critical historical moments like the Civil Rights Movement can be seen as populist under this theme. However, Worsley's reading promises potential insight into the analysis of populism as a recurring trope in the presidential discourse of Reagan and Clinton. Packer also states that the most important aspect of populism is its ability to rally the people. "[A]bove all," he writes, "populism seeks and thrills to the authentic voice of the people."³⁶ When writing about Bernie Sanders' version of populism, for instance, Taylor Gipple states that "the whole premise of Sanders' campaign is that he cannot bring these changes alone. No single president can make these changes alone. He needs the American people just as much as they need him. He'll lead the American people just as much as they lead him."³⁷

To conclude, scholars of populism recognize multiple meanings of the concept which do not all fit together to form a cohesive whole. There is not, then, one universal definition of the word. Yet, five themes appear repeatedly in the literature, thereby shedding light on what people who use this term *may* be referring to. These constitute potentially useful starting points for exploring populist rhetoric in Reagan's and Clinton's oratory. Substantial scholarship on both men reflects sustained attention to the two presidencies; yet examination of both in relation to populist themes promises to build on the current academic understanding of populism generally and of the two presidents as leaders of "the people" in particular. Because their political

philosophies diverge, such productivity pertains as much to the original analysis of populism as it does to the two presidents' own rhetorical repertoires.

Exemplary Texts

The 2016 campaign has seen rhetors as diverse as Mike Huckabee, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump labeled populist at one time or another. Because of the concept's diverse meanings and uses, this project begins by exploring two questions: (1) What do people mean when they label a politician as populist? (2) Is this an illuminating descriptor? This project explores these questions by building on and then analyzing Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton in chapters two and three, respectively. In light of populism's descriptions thus far, select texts from the campaigns of both presidents are analyzed in order to identify and assess how this style of rhetoric functions in divergent leaders' speeches. By using the conventional wisdom of populism sketched here to examine both presidents' speech habits, analysis of both as populist rhetors is pursued.

Fourteen documents—seven from Reagan and seven from Clinton—are analyzed. Limiting the number of texts enables the critic to narrow the scope of the project, but the diversity of the documents selected aims to provide a range of settings and audiences sufficiently broad to discern the functions of populist appeals across the presidents' oratory. Together, the fourteen chosen texts form the rhetorical experiences that are approached using what communication scholar Wayne Brockriede terms the "battery of searchlights"³⁸ available to the critic from within extant theory. Dimensions of that battery are examined further in the discussion of method that follows shortly.

First, though the specific experiences chosen for both Reagan and Clinton merit attention. Comparability was a key goal in choosing specific speeches to study. That is, if one genre,

occasion, or time frame helped narrow the texts for Reagan, equivalent texts are examined for Clinton. Ronald Reagan's first inaugural, for example, is central to the analysis of his initial months in office. Consequently, Clinton's first inaugural receives equal attention. Although the time periods are considerably different, the similarity of the context between each parallel speech provided contributes to a foundation on which study begins. This comparison of the texts stems from the genre categories that they occupy. According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, two prolific rhetorical-critical scholars, the "forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands. . . . They are central to criticism because they define the unique qualities of any rhetorical act, and because they are the means through which we come to understand how an act works to achieve its ends."³⁹

The genres that each set of texts represent will also shape a lens through which the presidents' words may be studied productively. Knowing the style of a speech allows researchers to discern what is expected in a particular context contrasted with what was actually spoken. The details of each particular type of speech used in this project are explicated further as chapters two and three unfold. The ways in which both men either adhere to or avoid a genre's expectations help to reveal their rhetorical tendencies. The goal of the brief introductions to each genre that follow is to explain the reasoning behind using these particular texts rather than others.

The first texts are the speeches by Reagan and Clinton announcing their initial successful run for their party's nomination. Reagan announced his candidacy for the 1980 election on November 13, 1979, and Clinton chose October 3, 1991 to declare his intention to seek the presidency the following year. Presidential announcements often represent an initial attempt to relate to the public, and thus constitute a useful starting point in parsing the speeches. Ryan Neville-Shepard, a Professor of Communication Studies at Indiana University, contends:

Presidential announcement statements emphasize for the first time in a campaign a candidate's fit for the highest office in the United States. The genre is such a powerful ritual, as *Time's* Kenneth Baer and Jeff Nussbaum . . . noted during the 2008 primaries, that the speech tends to follow a "time-tested template." . . . Generally, announcements describe how the candidate emerged from humble roots due to hard work, how the nation has solved past crises by remaining faithful to basic principles, and how following those same principles can solve contemporary struggles. In short, those announcing their candidacy are hopeful for the country's future and for their chances of winning office and strengthening the nation.⁴⁰

Each part of this "template," from reciting one's challenging start in life to addressing contemporary struggles, is a rich site for investigation. This pattern of speaking can reflect some of the populist themes specified earlier. Discussing humble roots, for instance, can be seen as putting oneself on the "side" of the working class regardless of the speaker's current circumstances. Thus, looking at the announcement speeches will allow for an understanding of where their populist tendencies may have originated.

Attention turns, second, to the addresses by Reagan and Clinton accepting their parties' nominations. Ronald Reagan gave his first speech of this nature on July 17, 1980, and his second on August 23, 1984. Clinton gave his speeches on July 16, 1992, and August 29, 1996. These texts target either the Democratic or Republican loyalists, as well as Americans at large in the television audience. This is an especially interesting ground for presidential hopefuls to navigate because of this small audience/broad audience merger. On the one hand, the candidates are speaking to the members of their own party, trying to excite them about party goals. On the

other, they cannot be too exclusionary because of a more diverse broadcast audience.⁴¹ Despite the information that acceptance speeches may reveal, relatively little has been done on this speech type, at least when compared to other categories, such as the inaugural address. As both Reagan and Clinton are analyzed based on comparable contextual detail, potentially useful similarities and differences can be drawn from these speeches. Additionally, the acceptance speeches reflect what their “platform” is in running for office and often mirror the goals of their political party at the time.

Two debates each from both candidates’ campaigns constitute the next discourses to be examined. Reagan’s 1980 debate with Congressman John Anderson is the first, followed by his 1984 debate with former Vice President Walter Mondale. For Clinton, the debates include the 1992 Town Hall debate with President George Bush and businessman Ross Perot, and the 1996 debate at Hartford with Senator Bob Dole. The debates, in comparison to the other texts chosen, are arguably the least likely to have prominent and recurring populist appeals. In all four debates, the focus is very specifically policy and agenda based, as is evidenced by the constant back-and-forth of statistics that are supposed to “prove” the country is either in better or worse shape because of the president currently in office. So the questions here will be what role(s) if any do populist appeals play in the varied debate formats, and what might be said about what the range reveals regarding populist analysis and other critical modes in assessing debate discourse?

Attention turns, finally, to the presidents’ inaugural addresses. Campbell and Jamieson argue that the genre of the inaugural address consistently represents “a covenant between the executive and the nation that is the essence of democratic society.”⁴² This agreement generally helps to unify the audience, use communal values, state the goal of the new administration and

show that the president understands the limits of their power.⁴³ Each of these qualities can be done in ways that reflect populist impulses, as well as other rhetorical modes.

Reagan delivered his first inaugural address on January 20, 1981, and his second on January 21, 1985. Clinton delivered his first on January 20, of 1993 and his second on January 20, of 1997. These speeches, given after the winner of the election is sworn into office, are useful examples of their rhetorical style. Lloyd Bitzer, when describing how inaugural addresses illuminate rhetorical habits that “fit” an occasion, states that “the inauguration of a President of the United States demands an address that speaks to the nation's purposes, the central national and international problems, the unity of contesting parties; it demands a speech style marked by dignity.”⁴⁴ Speaking of the country’s purpose could become a tactic for transcending political ideologies. Thus, taking a close look at these four speeches by Reagan and Clinton has the potential to increase this study’s understanding of populism as an explanatory concept, independently as well as in concert with other analytical perspectives.

Understanding the rationale for choosing the texts is critical for determining the project’s prospective contribution to rhetorical studies. All fourteen of these documents contribute to the depiction of a clear picture of how Reagan and Clinton spoke a majority of the time. In review, the announcements are the first step into the national spotlight and as such act as speeches which lay the foundation of each man’s respective campaign. The nomination addresses allow for insight into how the candidates balanced the demands of their own party with efforts to shape the general public’s perceptions. The debates constitute an intense deviation from the style of all the other chosen addresses, and their presence helps confirm the rhetorical tendencies found in the analysis of other speech types. Finally, the inaugurals are near the pinnacle of important presidential speeches and reflect each man’s broadest stances and customs.

Method of Analysis

By reviewing each text on its own first, and then bringing in the five themes of populism and other concepts, as appropriate, as a way to guide the analysis, this study aspires to illuminate presidential speech independent of *a priori* analytical guides. Yet, as Wayne Brockriede reminds us, discerning the relationships between particular discourses and more general concepts is essential if the critic is to provide useful answers to any study's essential question, "so what?" The method and its theoretical underpinnings that ultimately guide the analysis here evolved organically. The first step consisted of watching all fourteen speeches in their entirety while following along in the transcripts to create a familiarity with them. Any discrepancies between the written version and spoken version were noted at this time. Particularly relevant or unique quotations or ideas posited by either president were drawn out so that further research could be done specifically on these portions.

The next step consisted of breaking down each address into speech habits. These were not only habits agreed upon as typically significant by the academic community, but they also included more general patterns. For example, one of these habits was temporarily titled "Global Concern" and reflected anything Clinton said about how the United States interacts with the rapidly changing world during his time in office. Thus, these first sets of patterns were not based on general principles of rhetoric but instead extrapolated from the texts themselves. This step was taken to determine what each man spoke like without a preconceived idea of what was being sought.

After further reading, the rhetors' habits of returning to what Malcolm Sillars and Bruce Gronbeck term an American Value System became a focus of attention. Sillars and Gronbeck identify and explicate six core values prevalent in American political discourse; these include the

Puritan-Pioneer, Enlightenment, Progressive, Transcendental, Personal Success, and Collectivist systems.⁴⁵ Each applicable value scheme is defined, explained, and applied as appropriate in the chapters that follow, for Reagan and Clinton share some value features but also exhibit modes of appeal unique to the particular chief executive.

Also evident in succeeding chapters is that as analysis progresses, features of populist rhetoric, value analysis, and genre criticism help inform critique. At the same time, though, discursive strengths unique to President Reagan or President Clinton are woven into the critical approach, as appropriate, rather than ignored because they do not “fit” a predetermined model. Reagan’s penchant for storytelling, for instance, requires narrow attention to theory not necessarily applicable to Clinton. Such attention to the uniqueness of each president’s habits, though, does not eliminate the project’s overarching interest in the roles “populist” and “populism” play in defining political leaders both historically and in the 2016 presidential campaign. The research reported in the following chapters reveals populism’s “elasticity,” to be sure, but the project is not limited to informing our understanding of that notion alone.

By researching Reagan and Clinton independent of a predetermined analytical scheme, coming to the texts on their own terms, and employing a variety of concepts as appropriate to each rhetor, the project ultimately reflects Kenneth Burke’s sense of scholarship as an ongoing conversation. Burke clarifies:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You

listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him (sic); another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.⁴⁶

The potential usefulness of this thesis is in what it might contribute to such discussion about the role of populism in political speech, about the populist features of Ronald Reagan's and Bill Clinton's presidential persuasion, and perhaps about populism's place in public discourse in 2016 and beyond.

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Chapter Two: Reagan's Populism of Faith

In large part the current project is an attempt to understand populism as a factor in presidential persuasion. Two questions guiding research are (1) what do people mean when they use the term to describe a candidate, and (2) is populism illuminating as a descriptor? In this chapter, these questions are explored in relation to Ronald Reagan's presidential rhetoric. The completed analysis helps to reveal how Reagan employed "populism as a flexible mode of persuasion."¹ Although the term itself may be confusing due to its elasticity, discovering the ways the 40th president's speeches reflect the five themes of populism discussed in the introduction—that populist rhetoric (1) transcends ideology, (2) eschews an elite status for the speaker, (3) can evince working-class vs. elite tensions, (4) reflects "anti-ism," and (5) may attach to any activism involving "the people"—can shed light on the term. Focus for this chapter is not only on studying habits central to Reagan's style, but also on those habits essential to the perception of him as a populist. Thus, the answer to the first of the two queries which guide this analysis is discovered by understanding why pundits labeled Reagan a populist. Once this point is determined, it is beneficial to reflect on the results and determine the term's utility in rhetorical scholarship. In other words, in the following pages, the concept's meaning is analyzed in order to ascertain its significance.

Paul Erickson sums up Reagan's rhetorical legacy by describing him as "by far the most persuasive political speaker of our time. Reagan, Erickson continues, derived "remarkable power from his use of language."² The unanimity surrounding the president's ability stops only when discussing what particular trait made him a great speaker. Observers agree that he was persuasive, but they are not consistently aligned about what constitute the key characteristics of his persuasive talents. Michael Deaver, Reagan's Deputy Chief of Staff, attributed his success as

simply “the guy knows who he is.”³ A statement such as this may remind some of the common phrase in his campaign for reelection where his supporters were instructed to “let Reagan be Reagan.”⁴ This description, however, is too vague to draw generalizations from. The research presented here will help to clarify his habits. It is only by fully understanding how Reagan spoke that one can discover how the label of populist attaches to him.

Reagan revealed himself through his public addresses, which are the business of this chapter. Finding the answer to the questions presented unfolds in three parts. The intent of this chapter is to carve out a place in the conventional wisdom regarding Reagan, to see how this is reflected in the selected addresses, and to discern how both of these searches then shed light on the concept of populism. Thus, the first portion describes those oratorical behaviors generally agreed upon as characteristic of Reagan’s oratory. Four features of his public discourse are relevant: the consistent presence of religion, the use of stories as proof, dependence on values as story content, and pursuit of speaker-audience identification through the use of value-laden stories. Once these features of Reagan’s discourse are in place, attention turns to how these characteristics present themselves in the seven speeches. The reasoning behind choosing each of these addresses is available in the introductory chapter of this project. These steps are preliminary to the analysis that can be found in the third portion of this chapter. The five themes of populism repeatedly appear in the conventional wisdom and do so in multiple ways. In the analysis, it is clear that transcending ideology and eschewing elitism are the elements of populism which reveal themselves most thoroughly in Reagan’s rhetoric.

Understanding how this rhetorical political strategy intersects with the cornerstones of Reagan’s presidential speaking brings the analysis closer to answering the initial two questions. Populism’s elasticity is evident when one analyzes the ways populist impulses revealed

themselves in the texts studied. Although all five themes of populism are often present, he relies more heavily on some than others. Anti-ism and “the people” appear, but they are not employed as frequently as other traits, particularly efforts to transcend political ideology and to downplay an elite status; appeals of working class versus political elites lie between these two pairs. Historian Michael Kazin notes the critical nature of assessing Reagan’s populist habits, as well as those of Bill Clinton, when he writes that, because of them, “populism—the supposed discourse of ordinary, apolitical Americans—became, in the 1980s and after, a deliberate rhetorical project.”⁵ Study of President Reagan’s political speaking begins to establish the basis for Kazin’s claim.

Conventional Wisdom

Reagan has been the subject of critical inquiry for half a century, beginning with his tenure as Governor of California, 1969-1977. Since then examination of his discursive habits has continued, yielding extensive material. A wide range of approaches to the analysis of Reagan’s communication commend themselves. One reason for this is the sheer abundance of his presidential oratory. His words frequently act as exemplars for diverse rhetorical forms and theories. Sworn into office on January 20th, 1981, the first publications about his 1980 presidential campaign appeared later that same year. It is not an exaggeration to state that today information on nearly every aspect of Reagan’s life is available for researchers. From his childhood to his death after ten years of Alzheimer’s, historians, rhetorical scholars, political scientists and more have become fascinated with both his failures and his successes. Of interest within the plethora of material on Reagan, for the purpose of this project, is how he spoke. The following pages summarize what serves as the conventional wisdom about the president in

rhetorical scholarship. These are critical perceptions of his rhetorical practices, which promise to inform the analysis of populism in Reagan's oratory.

According to rhetorical scholar Mary Stuckey, much of American political rhetoric has an "evangelistic quality [that] has, of course, been present since before the founding and is present today."⁶ Language that mimics spirituality is not new by any means, but Reagan used it in ways that were uniquely successful. At one point he even hired a "Religious Advisor" to assist him in his 1980 campaign.⁷ Various scholars recognize that an important trait of Reagan's public discourse is his ability to unify the sacred and the secular.⁸ That is, Reagan did not simply explain that Christianity was important to the country, but at moments with no inherent religious dimension he spoke as if the event was imbued with sacred significance. Kurt Ritter and David Henry, when describing this trait of Reagan's rhetoric, refer to him as a secular preacher.⁹ Thus, whatever Reagan promoted in his speeches, he portrayed not only as a better path for citizens but as an American duty with moral consequences.

Rhetorical scholars Michael Weiler and Barnett Pearce state that this spiritual language denotes Reagan's civil religion, in which the discourse "appropriates freely from the Judeo-Christian concept of a God who works on earth through a chosen people, and it unabashedly identifies [America] . . . as the Chosen Nation through which other nations will be redeemed."¹⁰ The language of civil religion and the unification of the secular with the sacred is more easily understood if one considers Reagan's self-understanding. Scholar Ted McAllister states that Reagan's perception of his role was that of "an average American called temporarily to politics to clean up government."¹¹ He viewed the presidency as something that God had ordained for him, and this is likely a significant factor in why so much of his rhetoric sounded religious even when the events may have been secular.

Another widely held certainty about Reagan's rhetoric consists of his predisposition to use stories as evidence. Walter Fisher states that "Reagan's rhetorical achievement is aesthetic—a triumph of acting, telling stories, presence, and presentation."¹² Through this narrative aesthetic Reagan communicated his policies in a way that made them more easily understood. In his First Inaugural, for instance, instead of using a statistic as evidence of patriotism's centrality in American culture, Reagan told the story of Martin Treptow, who served and died in World War I.¹³ This story is meant to evoke a patriotism, and a sense that the listener should be like Treptow. Persuasion through storytelling is widely established as the way humans make sense of their world and reinforce character traits which are beneficial to society.¹⁴

So they functioned for President Reagan. Lou Cannon, who covered Governor Reagan as a reporter in the 1960s-1970s and has since written at least three books on his years in politics, writes that Reagan "never confused a speech with a fact-finding mission."¹⁵ This use of stories was not only a style of argumentation but a way to connect the audience to the importance of whatever topic he addressed. It can be argued that explaining research to an audience of millions is not as effective as reliving an anecdotal story and that this story-telling not only persuades the public but allows them to relate to the speaker. Terri Bimes summarized Reagan as a speaker who "skillfully used stories about individual Americans to personalize his argument for his audience."¹⁶

The affinity toward storytelling also lends itself to another widely agreed upon characteristic of Reagan's speaking, a focus on values.¹⁷ A brief definition of values to help guide this analysis comes from Milton Rokeach, as cited by Malcolm Sillars and Bruce Gronbeck. Rokeach states "a value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to alternate modes of conduct or end states

of existence.”¹⁸ Sillars and Gronbeck add that “perhaps no president in recent years has made so much of the direct statement of values as Ronald Reagan.”¹⁹ Although certain moral principles revealed themselves in the things Reagan said, he was surprisingly clear in his goal of restoring specific values that he considered American. Often he named the values on which he wanted to focus. In *Reagan Speaks*, Paul Erickson encapsulates this tendency by stating that “the overarching theme of Reagan’s rhetoric has been a restoration of our communal beliefs.”²⁰ Although these values change with shifts in American culture, at the time Reagan spoke he named them as family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom.²¹

The values Reagan focused on transitioned easily into his oft-made reassertion of the greatness of the American Dream. This vision, according to Thomas Goodnight, made the president the liberator, removing government from the equation and allowing citizens to have their own dreams.²² As an example, one advertisement from his reelection campaign, titled “Statue of Liberty (Reagan, 1984),” suggested that Carter broke the promise of America, but Reagan had fixed it. This type of a message promotes the greatness of America and simultaneously the greatness of Reagan. In this scene, the narrator states: “Today, the dream lives again. Today, the jobs are back. The economy is back. And America is back, standing tall in the world again. President Reagan: rebuilding the American Dream.”²³

By incorporating religious elements, using stories in lieu of evidence, and focusing on American values that he believed constituted the American Dream, Reagan promoted speaker-audience, or president-public, identification in a significant way. Kenneth Burke described his theory of identification as what happens between two people when their interests are joined or they share some principle in common.²⁴ The joined interest or common principles that allow people to identify can be real or imagined, but must be perceived by all parties involved. Means

commonly used by Reagan to hasten this feeling of identification from his audience included “humor, drama, naming a common enemy, and using contrasting conceptions.”²⁵ Robert Denton, when describing how Reagan’s personality and style were so well suited to the timeframe he was in, states “Ronald Reagan is simply a television personality. His manner of communication fits the requirements of television as a medium—not necessarily those of governing or ruling a nation. Reagan, through the medium of television, maximizes Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification.”²⁶

Weiler and Pearce state that “to share the values and interests of ‘the people’ is to be, in an important sense, one of them and thus to be identified with them. . . . [However] political leaders are, by any reasonable standard, an economic and social, as well as political, elite.”²⁷ Reagan overcame his obviously higher social status by portraying character traits that Goodnight named. These attributes include, he writes, “a stew of part Irish wit, part Hollywood acting, and part western grit—a recipe for the all-American image.”²⁸ The ability to obscure this prestige and present himself as if he were any other American made Reagan a master of identification through his rhetoric. Janice Hocker Rushing goes so far as to claim that Reagan not only identified with Americans but also helped sustain American identity. Rushing revealed the embodiment of this kind of rhetoric in the president’s introduction of the Strategic Defense Initiative during what his detractors came to call his “Star Wars” speech, when Reagan linked space exploration with what she termed myth of the American frontier. She explains: “Since a frontier only at first seems infinite and unknown but eventually becomes confining and familiar, unexplored spaces must be found if America is to maintain its identity as a nation of pioneers.”²⁹

Although Ronald Reagan’s tenure ended nearly thirty years ago, members of the Republican Party still “[hanker] for his heir.”³⁰ In the 2016 presidential primary campaign,

Republican candidates often tried to secure the party's nomination by attempting to align their politics with his legacy.³¹ In combination, the tactics Reagan used to promote identification between himself and "the people" exhibited what Gary Woodward termed populism's "elasticity." Whether Reagan actually was working class or believed in the "us vs. them" themes that permeated his presidential rhetoric mattered less than if the public believed in this portrayal. His oratory created and sustained his presidential *persona* as a man of the people, and yielded an example successors have sought to emulate in the intervening decades. As Weiler and Pearce aptly summarize, "the habits of discourse that his presidency in part adopted, in part reinforced, and in part created, will be difficult to break, and indeed such habits always are."³²

Exemplary Rhetoric

The rhetorical tendencies above present themselves not only throughout the plethora of scholarship on Reagan but also in the seven selected speeches for this study. His use of civil religion including the merger of the secular and sacred, his use of stories as evidence, his focus on particular values deemed American, and his identification with the audience are ways in which Reagan defined his rhetoric. These habits revealed themselves in nearly every address he gave. In the following pages, the addresses analyzed for this study are described thoroughly. Although each can stand independently as revealing multiple rhetorical themes—the focus will remain on what is relevant to the conventional wisdom, and to Reagan's perceived populist leanings.

Religion and faith saturate Reagan's rhetoric. In his 1979 announcement to run for the nomination, Reagan ended a speech that seemed focused on practical issues by stating, "I believe this nation hungers for spiritual revival."³³ Prior to this conclusion, he addressed the economy, energy, and foreign policy for the majority of the speech. By mentioning spirituality at the end,

the inference can be made that by repairing faith all the other problems can be more easily mended. Only seconds after this first statement, Reagan identified “the values upon which civilization is founded: “religion, education and, above all, family.”³⁴ He also introduced the theme of a “rendezvous with destiny” in this speech.³⁵ This is comparable to the personal calling he felt to lead America, which in this address he combined with America’s God-given mission to lead the world.

Reagan’s merging of the sacred and secular spheres continued in his 1980 address accepting the party’s nomination for president: “Ours are not problems of abstract economic theory,” he explained. “[These] are problems of flesh and blood; problems that cause pain and destroy the moral fiber of people who should not suffer the further indignity of being told by the government that it is all somehow their fault.”³⁶ Thus, the economy is not in a secular bubble but undergirded by implicit religiosity. In this statement, the actual morality of the people who suffered from the economic woes of the time is in jeopardy.

The president had moments that both implicitly and explicitly portrayed his religious leanings. The spiritual revival discussed above functioned to insert a feeling of religious duty into what is supposed to be a secular sphere, governing and the economy. However, he also explicitly called for religion based changes in government systems. When he accepted the party nomination for a second term four years later, for example, he said: “[If] our opponents were as vigorous in supporting our voluntary prayer amendment as they are in raising taxes, maybe we could get the Lord back in the schoolrooms and drugs and violence out.”³⁷ These more blunt statements about the need for the Christian faith in government only further verified the label of the secular preacher that Reagan obtained over his years in politics. Further demonstrating the

hand of God on the American government, he even stated that the act of giving an inaugural address was “nothing less than a miracle.”³⁸

In his second inaugural in 1985, after calling for a moment of silent prayer, Reagan himself provided an apt summary of how he often spoke of America. “In this blessed land,” he stated, “there is always a better tomorrow.”³⁹ These words of seemingly banal encouragement, paired with the knowledge of his civil religion, carried far more meaning than on the surface. The land is blessed because a Judeo-Christian God called America to lead the world. Tomorrow is better because this God works in the individual lives of her citizens, and those who follow the moral code described in this religion benefit. The religious underpinning of even simple statements like this reinforced Reagan’s specific belief system as the foundation of American greatness. The same greatness that Reagan spoke of renewing in citizens is revealed in his description of them as “dedicated to the dream of freedom the [God] has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream on to a waiting and hopeful world.”⁴⁰

One distinct way Reagan described the nation’s citizens was through narrative. If possible, stories are present in more of his rhetoric than religious symbolism. Examples of who the true Americans are appear in even the most unlikely places, like presidential debates. In his 1980 debate against John Anderson, an Illinois congressman who ran as an Independent after losing the Republican nomination to Reagan, he miscalculated his time and was cut off while discussing a military high school that he visited in Texas. When he was allowed to speak again, he was greeted by chuckles from the stage and audience when he ended stating,

And therefore, if I only had another second left, I’d say that that high school class in a military training—40 of its 80 graduates last year entered the United States service academies; West Point, Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy,

and to see those young men made me very proud to realize that there are young people in this country that are prepared to go into that kind of career in service of their country.⁴¹

The question asked regarded how to get citizens to join the military. The answer, at least in part, consisted of telling America that the people signing up are excellent and that he is proud of them. From this rhetoric, the problem is shifted. It is not the case that Americans do not want to defend their country, but rather the fact that government is not treating soldiers like the vital members of society that they are. The message is clear; there are still young American men who want to serve, and the government has to change its policy to treat them better. However, the young men currently serving despite the issues are exemplary Americans.

Reagan also shared personal stories from his life. These conveyed to his audience how his experiences reflected a typical American upbringing. Narratives of this nature particularly worked to help Reagan and the public relate to one another. When talking about the decline of America in his announcement speech in 1979, for example, Reagan told the story of living through the great depression:

I have lived through one depression. I carry with me the memory of a Christmas Eve when my brother and I and our parents exchanged our modest gifts—there was no lighted tree as there had been on Christmases past. I remember watching my father open what he thought was a greeting from his employer. We all watched, and yes, we were hoping for a bonus check. It was notice that he no longer had a job. And in those days the government ran radio announcements telling workers not to leave home looking for jobs—there were no jobs. I'll carry with me always the memory of my father sitting there

holding that envelope, unable to look at the rest of us. I cannot and will not stand by while inflation and joblessness destroy the dignity of our people.⁴²

The message is not only that Reagan had been through hard times, but also that this is what motivated him to help struggling Americans. The implication is that the solutions he presented in would not allow another depression. However, the announcement also simultaneously implied that the direction the political process in America pointed toward could lead to an economic collapse as bad as the Great Depression. It both instilled fear for an unknown future and reassured them about his commitment to making the future positive.

Through such stories Reagan spoke of restoring American values, particularly family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom.⁴³ When he discussed family, Reagan often mentioned how burdened they had become due to economic hardships and government greed. In his 1980 debate against John Anderson, Reagan said that government had coordinated an “invasion of the family itself, putting itself between parent and child.”⁴⁴ Carter’s administration did more than this, however. In his announcement to run Reagan stated, “Double-digit inflation has robbed you and your family of the ability to plan. It has destroyed the confidence to buy and it threatens the very structure of family life itself as more and more wives are forced to work in order to help meet the ever-increasing cost of living.”⁴⁵ Reagan’s idea of family clearly included the view that women should stay home and raise their children while men earned the family living. The mere idea that women would need to work to support their family was not a progression but a sign of the failing economy.

Closely related to family was the value called neighborhood. Although Reagan never defined it explicitly, social groups that can care for one another without government involvement formed a key to this value. Government assistance was not necessary because family—and by

extension neighbors—took care of one another. Subtly speaking against the idea of expanded social programs, in his second inaugural address Reagan maintained that “a growing economy and support from family and community offer our best chance for a society where compassion is a way of life, where the old and infirm are cared for, the young and, yes, the unborn protected, and the unfortunate looked after and made self-sufficient.”⁴⁶

The value of work was also prominent in Reagan’s addresses. This referred not only to the idea that work is dignified and that all Americans should have job opportunities, but also to the mistreatment of citizens who did work. This mistreatment came at the hands of a government which imposed high taxes and strict regulations. In his first inaugural address, Reagan stated that “idle industries have cast workers into unemployment, human misery, and personal indignity. Those who do work are denied a fair return for their labor by a tax system which penalizes successful achievement and keeps us from maintaining full productivity.”⁴⁷ Not being able to work caused human misery, and sometimes even employment came with its own financial disadvantages. He depicted the ideal situation as all Americans finding a job and keeping most of the money they made by being taxed less.

The values of family, neighborhood, and work interact significantly. As he explained in accepting the 1980 nomination:

Work and family are at the center of our lives; the foundation of our dignity as a free people. When we deprive people of what they have earned, or take away their jobs, we destroy their dignity and undermine their families. We cannot support our families unless there are jobs, and we cannot have jobs unless people have both money to invest and the faith to invest it.⁴⁸

Thus, Americans must have good jobs to sustain their families and to keep their dignity. There is a significant and unbreakable link between family values and the value of work.

The values of peace and freedom also overlap significantly. In closing the debate against John Anderson, Reagan contended that America “was placed here to be found by a special kind of people—people who had a special love for freedom.”⁴⁹ This freedom could only be protected by a strong America, however. As the President explained in accepting the nomination in 1980, “we know only too well that war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak. It is then that tyrants are tempted.”⁵⁰ In Reagan’s view, Americans value freedom, and keeping the peace by being strong was the only way to protect this freedom. As Reagan had it, “I would regard my election as proof that we have renewed our resolve to preserve world peace and freedom. This nation will once again be strong enough to do that.”⁵¹

Faith, narrative as argument, and value appeals eventuate, finally, in efforts to promote speaker-audience identification. This is perhaps the most subtle of all the tactics used in his speeches. Indeed, a key to successful identification with an audience is that they do not see it as a tactic at all but rather as an authentic performance of self. A speaker does not identify with an audience by telling listeners bluntly “I am just like you.” Instead, identification is often a much complex process of articulating joint interests, characteristics, or goals between them and the speaker. Reagan was exceptionally skilled at this process, even down to the way in which he spoke. Rhetorical critic Ellen Reid Gold explains that from

his little toss of the head [to] the "catch" in his voice at emotional points . . .

Reagan's gestures appear unintended and mimic those in spontaneous interpersonal conversation. Our familiarity with his mannerisms furthers the impression that we "know" Reagan. Additionally, his easy-to-understand

sentences contribute to the illusion of interpersonal discourse and also to the perception that the auditors are participating in a discourse rather than being spoken at.⁵²

Reagan sought to impress on auditors that he was a modest Midwestern American. In his first inaugural address, he stated that some thought America had become too extensive and complex to be “managed by self-rule.”⁵³ These doubters, however, for a simple solution would allow the people to be in control once more. Reagan presented it as follows: “Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself (sic), then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else? All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden.”⁵⁴ The implication is that American citizens can govern themselves, so a strong central government is unnecessary. Not only is his audience capable, but they are equally responsible for the direction of America. This puts Reagan on the same level as the people listening to his inaugural, even though his position and title are arguably the highest in America. As long as those both in and out of Washington help to “bear the burden,” reducing the bureaucracy benefits society.

The rhetoric above reveals what was typical in Ronald Reagan's oratory. These statements exemplify the rhetorical tendencies agreed upon by so many scholars whose work is reported in the first section of this chapter. The president's use of civil religion including the merger of the secular and sacred, the prominence of stories as proof, his focus on uniquely “American” values, and his promotion of identification with the audience constituted essential features of his oratory. They also link, in turn, directly to Reagan's skill in exploiting populist impulses in American political culture.

Populism

As discussed in the first chapter, at the very least populism is a contested term. Despite diversity and contention between and among scholars, however, five themes recur in efforts to define populism. These serve not as an inflexible system or theory that applies universally to all cases, but as traits or characteristics that may reveal how the populist impulse functions in American political life. As one lens through which to view Reagan's discourse they help illuminate his success in achieving identification with the American public. As a reminder, the five themes are:

- (1) Populist rhetoric transcends political ideology.
- (2) Populist rhetoric eschews the elite status of the speaker.
- (3) Populist rhetoric can be a pattern of the working class versus the wealthy or privileged political class.
- (4) Populist rhetoric often reflects a style of "anti-ism."
- (5) Populism is any movement involving "the people."

One consistent element in Reagan's oratory is that he often combined the sacred and the secular. This rhetorical tactic, when used in the political sphere, had populist undertones in that it frequently transcended political ideology and supported anti-ism, perhaps leading Weiler and Pearce to state that "populism and civil religion make a nice rhetorical blend. . . ." ⁵⁵ While religion has serious political implications when acted upon, sacred-sounding rhetoric is frequently perceived as a unifying and transcendent element. In the real world, however, words and actions do not always align neatly. As Michael Kazin states, "populist policies do not follow from populist rhetoric." ⁵⁶ And Peter Wiles notes the ironic relationship between religion and

populism when he concludes that populism “is religious, but it opposes the religious establishment.”⁵⁷

In Ronald Reagan’s speeches studied in this project, the intersection of religion and populism is frequently apparent. As a broad observation, Reagan rarely talks about religion in terms of going to a church or participating in events. Religion, rather, makes its way into the political sphere as a general guiding factor. For example, after reciting a litany of challenges the country faced as he assumed office in 1981, he assured the audience that success lay ahead. Reagan held that America’s progress required “our best effort and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds, to believe that together with God’s help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. And after all, why shouldn’t we believe that? We are Americans.”⁵⁸ The suggestion is not that Americans should be part of any specific religious activity. Reagan did not ask the public to attend Sunday worship services or tithe ten percent. Rather, he stated that the audience should believe that God could help them succeed by virtue of the fact that they are American. The same God, furthermore, asked that the love for freedom be passed on to the world through American preeminence. This type of rhetoric does not distinguish between Republican or Democrat, as he called on all Americans to believe in success through this God. Thus, political ideology merged with religious themes to promote unity among a broader range of listeners. Even taxes had a moral grounding in Reagan’s rhetoric, where they constituted such a burden that they “[robbed] the American people of their savings.”⁵⁹ Being against high taxes, then, equated to being against robbery.

The way in which Reagan told stories also fit multiple themes of populism. Stories can transcend political ideology and reveal anti-isms just as civil religion can, but these categories do not reflect the dominant ways Reagan used stories. Much of the time his narratives were called

populist for eschewing his elite status and attempting to explain a clear difference between the working class and the political elites. Reagan's populism is most apparent in the stories that reflect this. By presenting his own history as typical of most every American, and criticizing academic and political expertise as not being in touch with middle-class interests, Reagan used anecdotal evidence to promote identification with the public. Frances FitzGerald states that "throughout his political career, Reagan presented himself as a citizen-politician: an amateur who ran for office to restore common sense and common decency to a government which had grown too big, too complex, and too far removed from the concerns of average Americans. There was always a populist and anti-intellectual theme to his rhetoric."⁶⁰

At the outset in his 1979 announcement that he would seek the presidency in 1980, Reagan told of his upbringing. "[For] me," he began, the American saga entailed "growing up in several small towns in Illinois, as a young man in Iowa trying to get a start in the years of the great depression, and later in California for most of my adult life."⁶¹ This short explanation of where he came from told of a modest childhood consisting of multiple moves, mentioned that he survived what is generally called the worst economic downturn in American history, and noted that through it all he still succeeded beyond anything of which he might have dreamed as that boy in Illinois. His personal story, thus framed, downplayed the elite status of later life emphasizing the early struggles, challenges with which tens of millions could identify. Reagan also described the boundary between those who work and those who spend. He announced in accepting his party's nomination in 1980 that he would "put an end to the money merry-go-round where our money becomes Washington's money, to be spent by the states and cities exactly the way the federal bureaucrats tell them to."⁶² Reagan thus indicated that the working

class earned money but the political elites spent it. Not only that but they spent it wastefully, and that the cycle of tax collection and spending had to end.

Appeals to fundamental cultural values permeated Reagan's rhetoric, both during campaigns and once in office. Most often the values appealed to transcended Republican or Democratic leanings, helping Reagan to depict himself and his programs as "for the people." Part of the genius of Reagan's assessment that a good many Americans shared was the vagueness with which he defined both the values and the audience. Family means different things to different groups of people, and to have a clear understanding of the meaning one needed to know how the speaker used the word, as well as how the audience(s) interpreted it. This can be a problem when ascribing certain principles as held by a universal audience, but Reagan did not seem to struggle with this potential complication. According to Kazin, "like past conservatives who engaged in populist talk, the president never attempted to define 'the people' too closely. . . . It wouldn't do to call attention to class divisions that could upset the new coalition. So, in his unique fashion, Reagan simply transcended the problem."⁶³ Both by focusing on American values and by being careful not to define his audience too specifically, Reagan's rhetoric proved compelling, more often than not, to a plurality—if not a majority—of "the people."

The president's statements regarding values had the potential to address multiple populist themes. When he accepted the party's nomination in 1980, he reported that "everywhere we have met thousands of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans from all economic conditions and walks of life bound together in that community of shared values of family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom."⁶⁴ By including three political affiliations, Reagan sought to replace political ideology with appeals to value terms shared by all Americans. He thus attempted to create a unified audience which he vowed to defend. Reagan also appealed implicitly to trust as a

common cultural value. He often explained a desire to put decisions into citizens' hands. In the same address, Reagan stated that with him, "the trust is where it belongs—in the people."⁶⁵ Michael Weiler summarizes Reagan's appeals to trust by stating that "the celebration of the common wisdom of the average citizen was one of Reagan's most often used and effective themes."⁶⁶ Because few in any audience would argue that this ideal is anything but a high order value, it mattered little that the president's use of the term was rarely accompanied by an explicit definition of "trust."

Kenneth Burke's conception of identification constitutes Reagan's final rhetorical tactic, a trait that complements well the civil religion, narrative, and value appeal variables. Identification, in fact, may be the single most important component of any critique that aims to apprehend the elusive concept of populism. As Weiler notes, "the point of the populist strategy is to convince an audience of a speaker's identification with them, of his membership in their group. This identification is aided by proof of a speaker's awareness of the people's concerns and aspirations, but far better to have actually shared them."⁶⁷ Reagan often employed humor and siding with the "average citizen" as means to promote speaker-audience unity. These tactics translated into an approach which eschewed his elite status and separated the working class from the wealthy elites. Some scholars point out that the more difficulties Reagan had in performing his duties, the more likable, he appeared. Even "jokes about his lack of attention to the details of policy," Kazin argues, "may only have burnished [Reagan's] image as a leader with the common touch who understood as much as the job required."⁶⁸

As another example, when talking about his economic plan during the 1980 nomination acceptance speech Reagan said, "we will simply apply to government the common sense we all use in our daily lives."⁶⁹ A statement such as this not only tries to simplify the complexity of

running the government but also equates it with running an individual life. The same common sense, he implied, is easily applicable to both arenas. The President also used his wit frequently to relate to the American people. In his first debate with Vice President Walter Mondale, his opponent in the 1984 reelection campaign, Reagan had what may well have been his poorest communication performance of his political life. His answers to questions were meandering, he seemed ill at ease, and during the closing statements—a Reagan strength from the start of his political career—he lost track of time and he was still talking as the camera moved away and the microphone went dead.

Media coverage of the debate focused on Reagan's less-than-Reaganesque performance, raising the prospect that the decidedly underdog Mondale might have some hope for success, as observers asked for the first time whether the president might be too old to do his job. So when the president met Mondale for the second and last time, Reagan was ready. In response to the first question, the president looked at his questioner and said he thought that there might have been concerns about age expressed after the first debate. Reagan thanked the questioner, turned to the camera and said to the American public, "I want you to know that . . . I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience"⁷⁰ Not only did the moderator, panel, and audience laugh, but the cameras focused on Vice President Mondale who may have laughed hardest of all. The simple line so effectively worked to Reagan's likeability and identification that age was not a major issue for the rest of the campaign, and he won that election in a landslide.

The four themes that constitute the conventional wisdom about Reagan and that appear frequently in his presidential rhetoric also reveal his populist impulses. His religious rhetoric often transcended political ideology and consisted of anti-isms. His use of narrative as a

dominant form of evidence helped eschew his personal status and pit the working class against the wealthy elites. His focus on values reflected “the people” in the most ambiguous ways, allowing audiences to define them through their own experiences, to transcend political ideology, and to create a strong sense of identification between himself and the American public.

Concluding Remarks

For all intents and purposes, Ronald Reagan entered politics in 1964 when he delivered a speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater’s ill-fated presidential campaign. Over the next quarter of a century Reagan proved a compelling orator whose skillful rhetoric defined his political career at every stage. Audiences identified with him, and he consistently scored high marks on a scale often challenging to politicians: likability. Of his landslide reelection, for example, Michael Kazin observes:

[In] the wake of his sweeping re-election in 1984, Reagan was so well liked that reporters were loath to point out such a clear contradiction between his words and his program. An aura of mysterious strength enveloped him; it was hard to belittle a man in his seventies who kept smiling after being shot by a would-be assassin and who gave uplifting, entertaining speeches on a regular basis.⁷¹

This makeshift shield against criticism was created and sustained by his oratorical skill. The rhetorical habits that have been examined in this chapter are grounds for the likability Kazin described.

The speeches examined in this portion of the project consistently evinced themes grounded in faith, employed value-laden narratives as proof, and allowed Reagan to promote identification between himself and the public in ways that audiences felt at one with him. These features permeate the speeches studied here, and they help to explain how Reagan employed

“populism as a flexible mode of persuasion.”⁷² Populism’s elasticity is evident in that persuasion. Although all five themes of populism are present in his rhetoric, he heavily relies on some more than others. Anti-ism and “the people” appear fairly regularly, but they are not repetitive. Instead, what is appreciated is the consistency with which he sought to transcend political ideology, downplay his rise to the upper echelons of economic and political systems, and pit the working class against those same upper reaches.

Discernible patterns of populist appeal in Reagan’s rhetoric led Michael Kazin to contend that the fortieth president’s speech habits constituted an important contribution to populism’s rise at the end of the twentieth century. Because of Reagan and one other president, Kazin writes, “populism—the supposed discourse of ordinary, apolitical Americans—became, in the 1980s and after, a deliberate rhetorical project.”⁷³ The other president who contributed to populism’s prominence at the end of the century was Bill Clinton, to whom attention turns in chapter three.

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Chapter Three: Clinton's Populism of Hope

If this analysis were limited to President Ronald Reagan, one might define populism as a rhetorical tactic that fits the most used themes examined in chapter two, eschewing elitism and transcending political ideology. However, such a course would not constitute complete answers to the questions that lead to this study. Instead, turning attention to President Bill Clinton reveals more about the concept of populism itself as well as about how populism functioned in the president's performance of his responsibilities. The following analysis explores the roles of populism in Clinton's presidential rhetoric. The five-part description of populism employed in chapter two carries over to the analysis here. And as was the case with Reagan, where analysis may be better informed by drawing on additional critical perspectives, the assessment is not limited to populist teachings alone. As with Reagan, seven Clinton speeches form the primary data for evaluating him. The chosen texts yielding the crucial foundation for addressing the same two questions broached in the criticism of Reagan: (1) What do people mean when they use the term populist to describe a candidate? (2) Is populism an illuminating descriptor? The same method and organization utilized in chapter two continues throughout chapter three. Analysis begins with an orientation to the conventional wisdom regarding Clinton as presidential communicator, and then turns to an overview of the discourses chosen for this study. With these two steps in place, Clinton's populism becomes the chapter's focus.

Clinton's rhetorical habits draw the attention of scholars whose criticism of his campaigning and leadership results in a conventional wisdom that both forms the chapter's starting point and foreshadows understanding populism's place in his presidential persuasion. Clinton's skill in rhetoric, on researchers' views, equaled that of President Reagan. Clinton, like

Reagan, was rarely if ever described as a poor communicator. Although they seemed to thrive in different areas, their performances of the office reveal clearly overlapping tendencies. Evaluators most often assess Clinton as a good-to-great communicator. As Craig Allen Smith states, he “is good on television, better in person, and best when interacting personally with questioners.”¹ Study of Clinton’s discourse reveals that he shares with his predecessor three of four features of his public communication. Like Reagan, Clinton employs narrative as an important dimension of the arguments he advances, frequently links the stories he tells to compelling American values, and employs both stories and value appeals to promote identification between himself and the American public. One respect in which they differ pertains to Reagan’s emphasis on faith or religion in his discourse. Although Clinton’s faith is important to him, a more frequent and consistent component of his presidential rhetoric is his emphasis on hope and optimism.

After establishing the linguistic habits he was known for, the following section of this chapter will focus on revealing examples in the texts chosen for this study. Much like the chapter on Reagan, the explanation for why these specific texts are representative was established in the Introduction. As a review, the texts include his first announcement to run for office; his addresses accepting the Democratic nomination in 1992 and 1996; the first Town Hall debate in a presidential campaign, which featured Clinton, President George H.W. Bush, and Ross Perot in 1992; his debate with Sen. Bob Dole, the Republican challenger his 1996; and his Inaugural Addresses.

It is only by fully understanding what the conventional wisdom consists of and how it plays out in Clinton’s rhetoric that this project can add to the body of knowledge concerning the 42nd President of the United States. The third section of this chapter is an analytical look at the elasticity of populism, which aids in the analysis of Clinton’s speaking generally and of his

appeals to “the people” in particular. Revealing the ways in which populist label is attached to him can commence after the foundation of conventional wisdom is laid and rhetorical examples are understood. These two components will illuminate not only his rhetoric, but the term populist itself and what scholars mean when they use it. Populism can, as argued in chapter one and adapted in chapter two, have many, sometimes even contradictory, definitions. In the second chapter, a close examination of Reagan’s rhetoric was presented to illuminate his populist tendencies. The following chapter presents the same method with Clinton. Close scrutiny of Clinton’s rhetorical habits portends an even more thorough understanding of how populism functioned in twentieth century presidential speech. In combination with the preceding critical evaluation of Reagan, close critique of Clinton should move the project closer to useful answers to the two questions the thesis seeks to answer.

Conventional Wisdom

Researchers often begin with more general questions about Bill Clinton, the person, before moving to matters of leadership, communicative habits, and so on. For example, the documentary “American Experience: Clinton” can seem to some to answer the question, “What kind of man was Bill Clinton?” Journalist and author John Harris, in the introduction of this film, summarizes both Clinton and the film saying that “Success, misjudgment, in some cases catastrophe, followed by comeback: that resilience is central to who he is as a politician. I think it's central to who he is as a man.”² This focus however often disregards the significance of the oratorical habits that led to his success. Although there is not the abundance of literature on Clinton’s rhetoric that there is on Reagan, there is still ample information and a general academic consensus on key traits in his rhetorical style. The following pages examine the conventional wisdom about the president in rhetorical scholarship. These descriptions are not truths about him

as a man, but critical perceptions of his rhetorical practices which promise to inform the analysis of populism in Clinton's oratory.

While Reagan is known for combining the sacred and secular, Clinton is known for his constant repetition that the future will be better than the past. In fact, one of the key themes of his rhetoric throughout his presidency is the metaphor of "building a bridge to the future."³ Although not specifically titled that until his second campaign, the theme presents itself many times in the first campaign as well. Examples of this from the texts chosen for this study will be further revealed in the next section of this chapter; here the academic agreement on this trait of his rhetoric is established. The phrase was invented by Michael Waldman, a Clinton campaign assistant and speechwriter. Describing the slogan's creation during the 1996 reelection campaign, Waldman reports that in response to an idealized past presented by the challenger, Sen. Bob Dole, "it was now clear what our speech had to do. Dole wants to build a bridge to the past; Clinton would build a bridge to the future. The truism in American politics is that the more optimistic candidate always wins."⁴ Progress is a key theme in each of the Clinton speeches studied for this project. He constantly reminded America of the reasons that certain decisions were necessary or that they had become necessary.

Rhetoric that reveals a tendency to talk about a better future often fits under the description of reform. The truth in this statement derives from the notion that for things to get better, they necessarily have to change. Policy reform is not the crucial element here because it may not be perceived as inherently rhetorical. Instead, a loftier type of reform that betters the nation as a whole and brings it from its current position to a better one is needed. This change came in the form of the New Democrats, led in part by Clinton in the mid- to late-1980s. New Democrats were more centrist than earlier incarnations of the Democratic party in more than

rhetoric; they represented a “substantively new Democratic approach to active government.”⁵

The way Clinton spoke about the past, reform and the future left a precedent for other Democratic presidents and altered the party irrevocably. Waldman states that, in his work with the New Democrats, Clinton “had not only revived his own fortune, he had also succeeded in changing the way Democrats talked to the public, how they defined themselves.”⁶ Kenneth S. Baer, in his book *Reinventing Democrats*, summarizes this success when he writes that, “in fact, observers of all stripes commented on how much the Democratic Party had changed under Clinton.”⁷

The next of the habits that help create Clinton’s rhetorical style is shared with Reagan as well, although Clinton used it in a unique way. In the previous chapter, it was shown that Reagan had a propensity for telling stories. Clinton shares this feature but his stories are often far more personal than the narratives typically found in a Reagan text. Clinton regularly told his audience about his roots, his own and his family’s challenges early, and his experiences in life. His humble beginnings in a town providentially named Hope, Arkansas, functioned to explain his actions as president years later. As rhetorical scholar Thomas Rosteck explains, “by rounding out an action, a story not only focuses attention and judgment, but also offers an explanation about the significance of those actions.”⁸ Even his healthcare reform proposals were made meaningful in part due to the repeated fact that his mother, who was a single mom, worked as a nurse to support him and his brother when they were children.⁹ This small detail gave Clinton a way to explain why health care is of particular importance to him individually.

It is entirely possible that this predisposition for telling stories stemmed from his small-town upbringing. All “my kinfolks,” Clinton noted “could tell a story, making simple events, encounters, and mishaps involving ordinary people come alive with drama and laughter.”¹⁰ But

Clinton chose to use stories for more than personal reminiscences. Rather, he integrated the personal with the public when he wove stories into policy positions and statements. After a failed election campaign in Arkansas, Clinton recounted how his wife, Hillary, told him that “we’d failed . . . by doing too many things at once, without a clear story line and an effort to prepare people for a long sustained struggle.”¹¹ It is clear from this statement that both Hillary and Bill Clinton were aware of the power stories could have in leading people. He even ends his biography keeping the theme of story close by: “I’ve simply tried to tell the story of my joys and sorrows, dreams and fears, triumphs and failures. . . . I think it’s a good story, and I’ve had a good time telling it.”¹² From his own words and from the academic community, whether or not it came naturally or was contrived, what is clear is that the examples from his life shaped how he talked about public policy.

In addition to his optimistic rhetoric about the future and his storytelling, scholars agree that Clinton consistently focused his public addresses on values. A brief definition of values to help guide this analysis comes from Milton Rokeach, as cited by Malcolm Sillars and Bruce E. Gronbeck. A value, Rokeach maintains, “is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to alternate modes of conduct or end states of existence.”¹³ The values that guide Clinton’s thinking and underlay his presidential discourse were distinct from the ones that are well known in Reagan’s use. Rather than having a set of values that he prescribes to all Americans, Clinton focuses on two values that he wants to instill in American life.

Clinton framed his rhetoric about values as to align citizens with the cultural benefits to follow from adopting and implementing policies his administration proposed. The values Clinton heralded were, first, that the government should take care of people when they needed it and,

second, that the people should act responsibly in all aspects of their personal and public lives. He named this scheme “the New Covenant,” and throughout his time in the White House he referred back to this concept, which originated with the work of the New Democrats. The proposed ideas about the relationship a citizen could have with the government not only influenced content for his speeches, but also guided the way in which he spoke to the public in general. The New Covenant encompassed the values that permeated Clinton’s rhetoric and underlay in substantial part his presidential persuasion.

A recurring theme at the 1992 Democratic Nominating Convention descended from the first value that defined Clinton’s view of the relationship between people and the government: the purpose of government is to provide for the well-being of the public. This interpretation of the relationship between the government and the people opposed directly the teachings and practices of the Reagan years, teachings followed as well by President George H.W. Bush over the four years following Reagan’s departure from office. Clinton countered the philosophy of the Reagan-Bush years not only in his convention speech, but with the production of most every facet of the 1992 Democratic Nominating Convention. As Larry D. Smith observed in his analysis of the convention’s rhetorical dimensions, “the words *people first* frequently appeared on the video wall behind the speakers and served as the convention’s dominant value appeal.”¹⁴ Policies that helped people, like the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, fit under the umbrella of government doing its part easily and “making our democracy work.”¹⁵ There were many examples of government agencies doing their part as the Clinton administration progressed forward in word and deed. Dick Morris, a political consultant to Clinton, explained the importance of values in planning the first presidential campaign: “[We] adopted a political strategy based on one word, ‘values,’ and our concept was that we would help you raise your

child better.”¹⁶ This side of The New Covenant can easily be categorized under the label of opportunity.

Opportunity, however, is not the definitive answer to enhancing the quality of life for American citizens. The government serving the people only constituted half of the value system Clinton wanted to renew, the other half had to do with citizen participation. Rhetorical scholar John Murphy contends that “from the moment William Jefferson Clinton announced his presidential candidacy, he spoke unceasingly of the value of work in the game of life.”¹⁷ Clinton understood his two-sided relationship between the government and its inhabitants as a fulfillment of the “original American covenant,”¹⁸ which he learned about from his grandfather. On top of having the opportunity, the people must choose to use it. Smith summarizes: “[If] all of these Americans could fulfill the terms of the New Covenant, they would reaffirm their common purpose and accept fully their personal moral responsibilities to make tomorrow better than today.”¹⁹ Citizens needing to fulfill their role in order to reap the benefits of government surfaced frequently in Clinton’s explanations of the relationship between government and the people. Clinton held his audience accountable, not only to take advantage of the opportunity and be a contributing citizen but also to be good to one another. The ideal of community, which was key in Reagan’s rhetoric, fit neatly under the umbrella of Clinton’s personal responsibility and helped him to be a centrist politician.

There is one final rhetorical habit that Clinton shared with Reagan. He persistently, if not purposely, sought speaker-audience identification. In line with Kenneth Burke’s teachings, the president aspired to demonstrate how his interests and those of the public were joined, based on principles they held in common.²⁰ Rhetorical scholar John T. Llewellyn describes Clinton’s persuasive method through identification after explaining that the power of such a technique

comes from “the fact that we are more likely to find attractive the positions presented by people we also find attractive or with whom we otherwise feel connected.”²¹

Robert McNeely, Bill Clinton’s official photographer from 1992 to 1998, used the president’s reaction to the Oklahoma City bombing in April of 1995 to describe how Clinton sometimes created this connection. By not simply showing up at an event and speaking, but by engaging his audience in different ways, Clinton practiced identification. By talking with and about the victims and their families as individuals, he proved himself a master in overcoming any ways in which he and the audience were divided, focusing their attention instead on variables that unified audience members with one another, as well as with the speaker. “[Clinton] stood there for hours and met with every single person and talked to everybody,” McNeely recalled. “It’s kind of a throwaway line now, I feel your pain, but he literally could. I mean he could take people and just hug them and connect to them in a way and really listen to them.”²²

Clinton used his ability to connect easily with people and his genuine empathy towards them to his advantage in persuasion. The “devices” he employed in so doing, Llewellyn continues, “included an intensely personal connection with the audience through his language and life story.”²³ Language often described as average allowed Clinton to connect to large segments of the population. His vocabulary, according to Glenn C. Getz, was “relatively plain . . . only occasionally using metaphors or lofty language.”²⁴ Explaining policy in terms that people could understand helped Clinton further to define his goals in terms of the public’s shared aspirations. Rather than relying on elevated prose, Clinton enhanced his speeches with different types of evidence. When discussing how he helped write Clinton’s speeches, for example, Waldman recalled that “his vernacular was policies, facts, stories; they would have to provide the raw material for his eloquence.”²⁵ In these two ways, Clinton created a presidency that brought

him closer to the people than his predecessor had been. Clinton was the embodiment of the average American. Rhetorical critic Rachel L. Holloway even states that “in effect, Clinton asked citizens to vote for themselves.”²⁶

Exemplary Rhetoric

The rhetorical tendencies above present themselves not only throughout the scholarship on Clinton but also in the documents studied for this project. The rationale for why these particular speeches are used is detailed in the Introduction. Key traits of Clinton’s oratory, as laid open in established research, are his use of optimistic language regarding the future, the place of personal narratives in his speeches, his focus on the values of opportunity and responsibility, and frequent success in establishing identification between himself and the audience. These habits reveal themselves across the body of work constructed by his presidential oratory. In the following pages, the conventional wisdom emanating from that body of work guides the analysis of the president’s oratory. In this way, the subsequent assessment of the populist tendencies is informed by current research on the 42nd president.

Perhaps predictably, Clinton’s explicit references to a bright and better future saturate the texts examined here. In the very beginning of his 1991 announcement speech, for instance, he stated that his daughter Chelsea was a “reminder of what our public efforts are really all about: a better life for all who will work for it, a better future for the next generation.”²⁷ This sentiment might be called the mission statement for the rest of his campaign and for his time in office. A future that is better than the present and past is not only possible, but it is Clinton’s primary goal in taking office. Even less ambiguous is a repeated story about his time at Georgetown where he named Professor Carol Quigley as cementing the foundation of progress for his life. He states, “Over 25 years ago, I had a professor at Georgetown who taught me that America was the

greatest country in history because our people believed in and acted on two simple ideas: first, that the future can be better than the present; and second, that each of us has a personal, moral responsibility to make it so.”²⁸ As time progressed, Clinton returned to the theme over and over. His 1992 acceptance of the nomination illustrated, as he said that sought a better future was an American tradition.²⁹ In his first inaugural in 1993 he mentioned investing in the future to “renew America.”³⁰

By the time the second cycle of campaigning arose, Clinton had solidified this idea into a standard theme. He introduced the concept by stating in his address accepting the nomination in 1996 that, “I love and revere the rich and proud history of America, and I am determined to take our best traditions into the future. But with all respect, we do not need to build a bridge to the past; we need to build a bridge to the future.”³¹ This idea was one that had been present in all of the speeches looked at before this point, but here his rhetoric became even more concrete. The question then became not whether or not America would change, but in what direction. The “bridge” Senator Dole sought to cross led to the past; Clinton’s path, in contrast, headed to the future and was “big enough and strong enough for all of us to walk across.”³² The strategy of focusing consistently on an optimistic future does not just consist of saying the future will be good but entailed frequently contrasting that course with the limitations of being guided by the past. As Clinton stated in the 1992 Town Hall debate at Richmond, “I got into this race because I did not want my child to grow up to be part of the first generation of Americans to do worse than their parents.”³³ Clinton advocated a bridge to the future. But, he cautioned, “[We’ve] got to build the right bridge.”³⁴ He was the candidate who knew which bridge to take.

Clinton’s his use of personal stories to explain why policy decisions mattered constituted another rhetorical trope displayed in his speeches. It was often the implication that the reason he

believed certain policies would better America is because he had personal connections to those policies. When he first accepted the Democratic nomination in 1992, Clinton told his story and how it shaped him. “I never met my father,” he began. And he continued:

He was killed in a car wreck on a rainy road three months before I was born, driving from Chicago to Arkansas to see my mother. After that, my mother had to support us, so we lived with my grandparents while she went back to Louisiana to study nursing. I can still see her clearly tonight through the eyes of a three-year-old, kneeling at the railroad station and weeping as she put me back on the train to Arkansas with my grandmother. She endured that pain because she knew her sacrifice was the only way she could support me and give me a better life. My mother taught me. She taught me about family and hard work and sacrifice. She held steady through tragedy after tragedy, and she held our family—my brother and I—together through tough times. As a child, I watched her go off to work each day at a time when it wasn't always easy to be a working mother. As an adult, I watched her fight off breast cancer, and again she has taught me a lesson in courage. And always, always, always she taught me to fight. That's why I'll fight to create high-paying jobs so that parents can afford to raise their children today. That's why I'm so committed to make sure every American gets the health care that saved my mother's life and that women's health care gets the same attention as men's.³⁵

Each of these points in his life served to lay the foundation for the next section of the speech, where he used the stories' lessons to justify why he cared about policy. For Clinton, in other words, stories motivated action. As an example, his mother raising two children as a single

parent led him to vow that he would “fight to create high-paying jobs so that parents can afford to raise their children today.”³⁶

Not all of these connections were as deliberately established, however. Clinton was a huge advocate for education reform, and both during campaigns and in office he portrayed himself as one of the only candidates so strongly committed to schools and schooling. When he announced that he would seek the nomination in 1992, he stated that “in a Clinton Administration, students and parents and teachers will get a real education President.”³⁷

Throughout these texts when asked about education he reiterated that it was a priority to him because of how it helped direct his life. When asked during a debate with Sen. Dole in 1996 to clarify his claim to support public education when he had actually attended private school early on he, Clinton responded: “First of all, Senator Dole, let's set the record straight. I was able, for two years when I was a very young boy, to go to a Catholic school, but I basically went to public schools all my life. And I've worked hard for a long time to make them better. Ninety percent of our kids are there.”³⁸ Public schools, Clinton declared, are where he attended school. His personal experiences there combined with the fact that a huge percentage of American children were also public school students supported his claim as the “real” education president.

In addition to personal narratives and an emphasis on the future, the values of opportunity and responsibility defined Clinton’s public addresses. In the seven speeches studied here the word “opportunity” appears forty-one times. This does not even include language that implied opportunity, as when Clinton emphasized the importance of “passing a domestic GI Bill that would give every young American the chance to borrow the money necessary to go to college.”³⁹ According to this value, the government is obligated to ensure that everyone in America has the chance to live a successful life. With this type of rhetoric at the base of his “New Covenant,”

Clinton grounded his appeals in established American values. The account that this agreement would give a new chance, or second chance, to downtrodden citizens permeated Clinton's oratory and heavily informed his plans for welfare reform. His first acceptance of the Democratic nomination provided a clear example. Intoned Clinton, his administration "will say to those on welfare: You will have, and you deserve, the opportunity, through training and education, through child care and medical coverage, to liberate yourself. But then, when you can, you must work, because welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life."⁴⁰

The other half of the value system that Clinton emphasized, which is also part of his welfare reform statement, is the personal obligation of American citizens. Throughout the speeches studied for this project, the word "responsibility" appeared exactly forty times, only once fewer than "opportunity." On Clinton's view, then, government's role was to help those in need, but once government had done so it was the recipient's responsibility to become independent. He advanced a vision of shared responsibility between government and the people. In the 1996 debate with Sen. Dole, Clinton summarized this view: "I believe that the purpose of politics is to give people the tools to make the most of their own lives, to reinforce the values of opportunity and responsibility, and to build a sense of community so we're all working together."⁴¹ Welfare reform could succeed only through this cooperation between the citizen and government.

The final characteristic of Clinton's rhetoric to be examined is the way in which he could promote identification, a sense of shared interdependence, between himself and his audiences. Viewing his interactions with the public even twenty years after his last campaign, one is impressed with his capacity to interact with anonymous audience members as if they are old friends. Llewellyn remarks that Clinton identified often by "speaking to the audience and about

the audience as though he were everyone's uncle or wise older brother."⁴² There is perhaps no more famous example of this ability than in Clinton's answer to one of the most important questions asked during the 1992 Town Hall presidential debate at Richmond. The debate format, in part, entailed the three candidates—President George Bush, businessman Ross Perot, and Clinton—being asked questions by members of an audience of undecided voters. A single mother asked, "How have you been affected by the deficit, personally?" Bush answered first, though his difficulties with the question worked against him in subsequent commentary on the debate's importance. Perot's answer was more personal and slightly stronger than Bush's. But both Clinton's answer and his approach to the questioner constituted one of the high points of his campaign. First, he walked toward the audience member, stopped, and asked her to repeat the question. After she did so, second, he answered by merging personal and policy matters in a single response. In "my State," he told her and millions watching on television, "when people lose their jobs there's a good chance I'll know them by their names. When a factory closes, I know the people who ran it. When the businesses go bankrupt, I know them."⁴³ When watching the debate it becomes apparent that even his inflection in this statement reflected a genuine concern for friends. By portraying the citizens of his state in this way he connected with the larger public—many Americans who heard Clinton talk *felt* as if he was their friend.

The word choice that Clinton used also assisted him not only in simplifying his message so that it was more understandable to a wider audience, but also in bringing it to a conversational level reminiscent of friends speaking in a living room. For example, in his 1991 announcement that he would run, he spoke plainly. "[Our] leaders," he told those whose support he sought, "created an ethic of take it while you can and to heck with everybody else."⁴⁴ The vocabulary that Clinton used here was remarkably relatable. The word "heck" is neither elite nor formal, but

rather a slang term that fit perfectly into his appeals to what Richard Nixon had termed “middle America.” And in the 1996 debate with Sen. Dole at Hartford, Clinton responded to the idea that he was elite by using the reference of someone who had grown up poor:

When Senator Dole made that remark about all the elitists, young elitists in the administration, one of the young men who works for me who grew up in a house trailer looked at me and said, "Mr. President, I know how you grew up. Who is he talking about?" And you know, this liberal charge, that's what their party always drags out when they get in a tight race. It's sort of their golden oldie, you know, it's a record they think they can play that everybody loves to hear. [*Laughter*] And I just don't think that dog will hunt this time.⁴⁵

This example is particularly interesting because it helped Clinton identify with his audience on two points. First of all, he implied that he was much like the man who grew up in a trailer. Clinton did not say that he personally grew up this way, but the fact that someone on his staff did made him empathetic. Moreover, in this anecdote the person on his team who had a lower class childhood recognized that Clinton was like him. Almost as if to say, “this poor person knows I am not elite, you should too.” The second characteristic of identification is the colloquial use of the southern phrase “that dog won’t hunt.” Much like the word “heck,” this is not a formal way to communicate. Instead, it comes off more as a familiar colloquial expression. Using language in this way assisted Clinton in conveying a persona that was understandable and relatable. It helped him identify with the listeners in that it made speaker and audience seem like one another.

The rhetoric sampled above reveals what was typical in Bill Clinton’s oratory. The habits that are agreed upon by the academic community defined his presidential speech: he employed optimistic language regarding the future, recalled personal stories that increased his credibility

with publics who often shared his experiences, focused on the values of opportunity and responsibility, and masterfully promoted identification with the audience in ways that made him one with the audience. These traits not only illuminate Clinton's habits of oratory, but they also yield useful insights into the ways populism functioned in his speaking and governing.

Populism

Populism is, at the very least, a contested term. A majority of the first chapter detailed what different scholars who have studied populism's origins, history, and applications think it means at its core. However, many of these academics come to varying conclusions. Drawing from those conclusions, this project deciphered five recurring themes that form a lens through which to study populism's operations and applications. Applied to Ronald Reagan's presidential speaking in chapter two, these themes provided some insight into how Reagan appealed to Americans' populist tendencies. The business of this final section of chapter three is, similarly to employ the same scheme in examining Bill Clinton's presidency. By understanding the reasons our 42nd president gained this label, and using examples from the given speeches to demonstrate, the term populism can be more fully understood. The five themes are:

- (1) Populist rhetoric transcends political ideology.
- (2) Populist rhetoric eschews the elite status of the speaker.
- (3) Populist rhetoric can be a pattern of the working class versus the wealthy or privileged political class.
- (4) Populist rhetoric often reflects a style of "anti-ism."
- (5) Populism is any movement involving "the people."

One familiar aspect of Clinton's oratory is his oft-reasserted belief that America would continually progress. One does not have to convince the people they are suffering for a message

to be populist. In fact, populism scholar Michael Kazin concludes that populism is actually “a grand form of rhetorical optimism,” and that “once mobilized, there is nothing ordinary Americans cannot accomplish.”⁴⁶ The themes of being against the political elite and transcending ideology thrive in Clinton’s optimistic language. His message of optimism is also distinct from Reagan’s in that a better future is not equivalent to the past. As he explained in his announcement that he would run for president, “we can usher in a new era of progress, prosperity and renewal. An era of opportunity greater than anything any generation of Americans has ever known.”⁴⁷

In his 1992 address accepting the Democratic nomination, Clinton combined his confidence that the future would be better than the past with the populist bashing of political elitism. At the outset he proclaimed, “now that we have changed the world, it’s time to change America. I have news for the forces of greed and the defenders of the status quo: Your time has come and gone. It’s time for a change in America.”⁴⁸ The shunning of the political elitism did not stop in his policy planning, however, as Clinton took the message that the United States must adjust and focus on the middle-class into his actions and appearances. Kazin asserts:

Clinton routinely cracked jokes, loosened his tie or donned a sports shirt, and was most comfortable in talk-show settings where he could soothe and persuade anyone with a problem. The party branded, for over two decades, as the property of arrogant liberals and ungrateful minorities was turning back, with an informal empathy, to average Americans in trouble.⁴⁹

These non-verbal symbols only further facilitated Clinton’s image as non-elite and focused on the average America.

Clinton also sought to transcend political ideology through optimistic language about the future being better than the past. The future is better for everyone, not just one Party or a select few. More than that, all Americans needed to work together in order to ensure this improved future would come to fruition. This appeal to a broad range of voters stemmed from the way he talked as well as the political points on which he focused. Kazin asserts that “his campaign trinity of jobs, health care, and education was certainly designed to appeal to voters of all races.”⁵⁰ The end of Clinton’s first inaugural encapsulated the way he did this rhetorically. He aimed his messages to a generalized “everyone” and disregarded party lines. In Clinton’s first inaugural address he stated that the idea of America is “ennobled by the faith that our Nation can summon from its myriad diversity the deepest measure of unity; an idea infused with the conviction that America’s long heroic journey must forever go upward.”⁵¹ The suggestion that America’s diversity allowed citizens to be unified and work toward a common future underlay the bipartisan policy ideals he advocated during campaigns and in office.

The second agreed upon feature of Clinton’s oratory is his use of personal stories. Clinton used these narratives to explain why he supported certain policy positions. Storytelling might be considered one of the most powerful ways to articulate a complex message. The stories Clinton told functioned to eschew his own elite status and to transcend partisan ideology. For example, the president explained that his belief in maintaining or upgrading the welfare system was not based on the Democratic platform; instead, it was rooted in the experience of having a single mother. Clinton often explained his belief that even honest, hard-working people sometimes needed assistance. His political beliefs stemmed from his own experience in the world. The personal stories Clinton articulated were genuine explanations for his positions. That they align with populist precepts affirms critics’ determination that populism’s teaching can help reveal

Clinton's rhetorical habits. As a presidential advisor once said of him, "his emotional instincts are very populist."⁵² If possible, Clinton could be considered authentically populist, which allowed him to convey his appeals in a fashion that often moved bipartisan audiences.

Stories also helped to eschew Clinton's elite status, to the extent that he had risen to the elite, by reaffirming that his political opinions disregarded private interests. He was not part of the political class, because his decisions were not politically expedient. Rather, they were based on genuine philosophical commitments based on his personal experience. In part, Clinton's goal in so depicting himself and other Democrats was to utilize "the same rage" toward the establishment that conservatives had channeled in previous elections.⁵³ Another example of Clinton explaining his policy choices based on his personal life appeared in 1996, when he accepted the party's nomination for the second time. Here he stated, "Let me say to our parents: you have to lead the way. Every tired night you spend reading a book to your child will be worth it many times over. I know Hillary and I still talk about the books we read to Chelsea when we were so tired we could hardly stay awake. We still remember them, and more important, so does she."⁵⁴ The implication is that his call for parents to be responsible and to help the government educate future citizens thus derived naturally from his own experiences and memories, rather than from political advantage.

In some ways reflecting Reagan's example, Clinton also frequently returned to a rhetoric based on values. Kazin notes the similarity to Reagan when he comments on the 1993 inaugural. He writes: "[Clinton's] inaugural address strummed chords of a Middle American populism that Reagan just as easily could have played."⁵⁵ At least a portion of this populism is found through Clinton's named values, the idea that the government must provide opportunity and citizens must then take responsibility. Following the precepts of the New Covenant, Clinton stressed that just

as Democrats and Republicans shared responsibility for national progress, citizens and the government were partners in future success. In the same address, he concluded: “You, too, must play your part in our renewal. . . . We need each other, we must care for one another.”⁵⁶ At the time, giving opportunity may have been seen as giving handouts and thus labeled as a liberal Democratic platform. But by saying that neither party was esteemed more than the other—rather, that they were both valued and essential—Clinton proposed policies that transcended political ideology. He reiterated this in his 1992 acceptance of the nomination:

We offer our people a new choice based on old values. We offer opportunity. We demand responsibility. We will build an American community again. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal. In many ways, it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work. It will work because it is rooted in the vision and the values of the American people.⁵⁷

The theme of opportunity and responsibility also reflects populism in that it should focus on the will and betterment of the people, in the broadest sense of the word. Opportunity is expected to originate from the wealthy and business-minded citizens. In his 1996 acceptance of the nomination Clinton said, “Tonight I challenge every business person in America who has ever complained about the failure of the welfare system to try and hire somebody off welfare and try hard. . . . We all have a responsibility, especially those . . . who have the ability to give poor people a chance to grow and support their families.”⁵⁸ The people at the bottom, however, also have a part to play as they are responsible for taking that opportunity. In his 1993 inaugural Clinton urged, “Let us all take more responsibility not only for ourselves and our families but for our communities and our country.”⁵⁹ In this way, the president called for action from all of the people, action that was supposed to help all citizens regardless of their economic status.

Finally, Clinton's ability to promote identification between himself and his audience served him well in appealing to populist impulses. In particular, identification helped the president to eschew elite status. John F. Harris, in his book *The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House*, observes of Clinton's ability to identify with an audience that,

Clinton's presidency was anchored to an authentically populist spirit and animated by genuine connection between a politician and common folk whose support he needed. . . . Opponents [could not] break the bond of affection between Clinton and many followers who saw him fondly as a leader who fundamentally liked people and wished to be liked. . . . His presidency survived because most citizens accepted him as he was, and wished him to stay where he was.⁶⁰

When Clinton identified with an audience, he was not viewed as among the privileged despite the successes he had achieved personally and professionally. Audiences related to Clinton because his story approximated theirs far more closely than it did the stories of the privileged or upper class. In fact, in his announcement speech he spent time criticizing the wealthy in America for not doing more to aid those less well off than they were. This would be a good example of the kind of identification that pitted the wealthy against the working class. Clinton related to middle America in that he believed the wealthy needed to be accountable, which implied that he and the larger audience were one.⁶¹

Clinton also used the type of identification that eschewed his own status, which increasingly approached the levels of the elite. One moment in which Clinton attempted to make this as clear as possible came in the form of a short phrase of identification after he attacked Wall Street's negligence: "I'm not out to soak the rich. I wouldn't mind being rich myself."⁶² By

saying this with a chuckle, the soon-to-be presidential candidate distanced himself from the haves, despite net worth between \$315,000 and \$1,100,000 in 1992.⁶³ The median net worth of American families the same year was \$52,000 according to the Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances.⁶⁴ Arguably well off, Clinton nonetheless proved successful in establishing and sustaining a bond with “the people.”

Concluding Remarks

According to Charles O. Jones, Bill Clinton lived his presidency as if he were in a perpetual campaign. “President Bill Clinton,” Jones observed, “aims for greatness as defined by approval. He wants to do good things for many people. He finds satisfaction in the immediate response. He does not, therefore, make a strong stylistic distinction between campaigning and governing; indeed, he has sought to perfect a campaigning style of governing.”⁶⁵ The purpose of a campaign, it may be argued, is to get the people to like the candidate. If it is the case that Clinton governed in the same way he campaigned, it is safe to assume that the rhetorical habits discussed here likely helped to propel him to success with the electorate. Clinton evinced an impression of openness and accessibility remembered to this day. Political writer Elizabeth Drew noted while observing an average day in the president’s life, “the populist Clinton . . . jawed with customers at the McDonald’s on 17th street just around the corner from the White House.”⁶⁶

What makes Clinton unique is that the habits that defined his populism and his presidential rhetoric historically fit Republican rather than Democratic chief executives. As political communication scholar Craig Allen Smith explains, “unlike Democrats [Michael] Dukakis, [Walter] Mondale, and [Jesse] Jackson, Clinton challenged [incumbent President George H.W.] Bush with a traditional, populist, conservative rhetoric.”⁶⁷ Members of his own party sometimes met Clinton’s assertion that he was a new kind of Democrat by responding that

he was a conservative in disguise. This may have been partly due to the fact that his rhetoric could sound like the conservatives'. Kazin even states that "Bill Clinton's reclamation effort notwithstanding, the populist idiom still resonates more routinely on the Right."⁶⁸ Even if this is true, Clinton showed that this style of speaking could well accommodate orators on the political left. He fundamentally changed the Democratic Party, and this is at least in part due to his use of populism, thus making him a significant figure in the discussion of populism.

By studying both Clinton and Ronald Reagan, and by accounting for the reasons they were considered populist orators, this project contributes to an appreciation for populism's place in twentieth century presidential speech. Reagan was a hero of the conservative revolution, Clinton a visionary whose New Covenant reflected the teachings of New Democrats. Yet critics, historians, and contemporaries alike conclude that vestiges of nineteenth century populism help explain their rhetorical successes with the American public. If both the 40th and 42nd presidents can be assessed as figures whose leadership informs the study of populism, despite divergence in their political philosophies, what does close study of their rhetoric reveal about populism in American speech? The project turns to this question in the next and final chapter.

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Chapter Four: Conclusion

The use of the term populist to describe candidates in the 2016 presidential race motivated the original interest in this project, and led to the questions that drove this research. Pundit assessments of political actors' popularity raised many questions about how people like Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, and Bernie Sanders could all be said to be doing well because of their "populist" tendencies. Even further than sharing a similar label, in the introduction, it was shown that journalists and others who called Clinton and Trump populist defined the word very differently. To refresh, Scott Beauchamp of *The Atlantic* states that "it is Clinton's heightened awareness of mundane commonalities that defines her version of populism."¹ Yet, according to National Public Radio's Mara Liasson, "Trump fits right into the classic tradition of American populism," which she states, "has always combined nativism with economic grievance."² Given this information, the stated problem is that candidates in 2016 have caused recurring use of the terms populism and populist, yet these expressions have no recurring or even clear denotation. The use of the terms populist and populism to describe the character and language of such varied actors is what this project set out to clarify.

As the purpose and rationale of the study were explicated, what might be called confusion around the term populism was discovered on both sides of the political spectrum. Additionally, this misunderstanding was not a recent phenomenon, as scholars as early as 1984 called for abandoning "populist" and "populism" due to the possible abuses that stem from their vagueness.³ Based on this, the question of interest was: Is populism deliberately polysemous or is it simply misunderstood? Moreover, are polysemous terms useful to scholarship? According to Peter Wiles, "all descriptively useful definitions are frayed at the edges. Framed so as to coincide with the natural divisions of the real world, rather than with logical constructs, they will and

should fail to cope with existing exceptions.”⁴ In Wiles’ view, a useful term *should* have a flexible definition. If the term instead is just misused to mislead or to promote political hostility, however, such use warrants exposure. So the current venture was undertaken with the goal of uncovering just what these political commentators mean when they label very different candidates under the same rhetorical strategy of populism. Because of the concept’s diverse meanings and uses, this project begins by exploring two questions: (1) What do people mean when they label a politician as populist? (2) Is populism an illuminating descriptor?

As the research progressed, it became clear that dealing with such an ambiguous term would be challenging. As an example, this study did not begin by defining populism. Rather than selecting one definition of populism and then applying it deductively to discourses of select rhetors, disparate theories or discussions of populism were examined to discern precepts potentially relevant to contemporary political discourse, since campaign rhetoric in 2016 initiated inquiry to begin with. In lieu of a single definition, the reading about populism and about these two chief executives yielded five themes associated with populism that illuminate political discourse. These traits of populism do not come together to create a single form that encompasses all rhetors or texts that might be termed populist. Rather they depict distinct ways that political actors have behaved as populists.

The goal in this final chapter is to clarify what this project set out to accomplish, to review discoveries made, and to explore why populism generally and its applications to 21st century political speech matter to rhetorical scholarship. In order to achieve this, the first section reviews how the project proceeded from beginning to end. This is undertaken in an effort to remind readers why certain decisions were necessary and how the research proceeded in chapters two and three. The second section of this chapter then recalls the analysis revealed in the

previous chapters. The conclusions drawn from studying Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton can stand alone, but they are even more useful if the lessons learned from their study inform more generally the ongoing research in populism and its place in political rhetoric. Finally, ways in which the study of Reagan, Clinton, and populism inform rhetorical scholarship are introduced and discussed.

Review

The first decision made about the direction of the project chiefly concerned how best to approach the study of populism meaningfully. Studying populism in theory alone would not likely reflect its practical applications to political speech in practice. It would also be difficult to discover its true meaning by simply looking up when and where it is said to be found, because as was discussed at the outset political pundits and commentators seem to find populism everywhere. Thus, it became advantageous to study the term through oratory in practice, particularly to speakers labeled populist, even if perhaps for different reasons. The idea is to understand how well-known and frequently-studied figures gained the label through the rhetorical habits that made them prominent political actors. By understanding the reasons that certain political rhetors' persuasive techniques led scholars, journalists, or others to connect them with populism insight into the term-concept-ideology might follow. Although one might expect a venture led by fascination over the 2016 campaign season to focus on the main political actors of the year, more was considered to be gained from stepping away from the current environment.

Thus, previous presidential candidates deemed populist in the scholarly and popular literature were examined. The search was for candidates who did not necessarily see themselves as populist and in certain cases even rejected the label. By doing this, the study focused on why others called the prospective subjects populist. Very quickly the choice was made to study two

politically divergent former presidents whose rhetoric often reflected surprisingly marked similarities: Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. There are many reasons that these men are exemplary for the task of this study. Practically, both presidents' political careers, philosophies of governing, and rhetorical habits have been studied extensively. Thus, the claims made in the foregoing analysis about their oratorical practices are considered to be grounded in an academic consensus, which established a stable foundation for the analysis that followed. Observers identified Reagan and Clinton as populist for different reasons. Their tactics of persuasion, therefore, help to explain not only the presidents' individual and combined practices, but about populist rhetoric itself.

A literature review of populism followed. Although a single definition was not applied in the analytical work done here, it was imperative to have a historical understanding of what scholars and pundits over time have thought of as populism. Review began by describing the origins of the concept in American politics, the People's Party in Kansas in the late nineteenth-century. From this understanding, various current descriptions of populism were aggregated. During this accumulation of evidence, it became apparent that although one all-encompassing definition of populism promised to be problematic, frequently recurring commonalities across theories and definitions could be identified. The five themes extrapolated from scholarly studies determined to be potentially helpful in initiating the analysis included:

- (1) Populist rhetoric transcends political ideology.
- (2) Populist rhetoric eschews the elite status of the speaker.
- (3) Populist rhetoric can be a pattern of the working class versus the wealthy or privileged political class.
- (4) Populist rhetoric often reflects a style of "anti-ism."

(5) Populism is any movement involving “the people.”

These five themes guided the navigation through the remaining research by providing a broad idea of what populism means and how it functions, or can function, in presidential speech. It bears repeating that the findings on populism do not combine to create the one “true” definition; rather, each theme is a unique *possible* portion of what someone might mean when employing the term. Once each theme was identified, the literature review continued by providing examples and definitions of each constituent, and by considering each component’s potential for informing the criticism of the two presidents examined.

Following the literature review, attention turned to the rationale for the texts chosen for analysis. One of the main justifications for using Reagan and Clinton in this project concerned the level of research already completed about each man. It made sense as well, therefore, to select texts which also have a history of being studied. In chronological order from the date spoken, the first texts studied were each candidate’s announcement to run for his party’s nomination. This genre of speech is compelling because it is the first time a potential president is in the public eye as a self-declared prospective candidacy for the presidency. The second set of texts consisted of Reagan’s and Clinton’s speeches accepting the respective party’s nomination. These four addresses attempted both to allay political divisions at the convention among those who may have had competing allegiances during the primary campaigns, while simultaneously setting a tone for reaching the broader general election audience, the great majority of whom viewed the performances at home. Thus, these speeches are particularly fruitful for study as they can reflect both general national sentiments and specific policy ideals.

Presidential debates comprised the third set of texts analyzed for this project. Both Reagan and Clinton had multiple debates for each of their campaigns. Aspiring to gain a

comprehensive view of how each man spoke in his debates, one debate each was studied from their first and second campaigns. For Ronald Reagan, his debate in 1980 with Republican primary campaign opponent John Anderson, who ran as an Independent after losing to Reagan. The lesson from the Reagan-Anderson debate entailed gaining appreciation for how the former California governor addressed television viewers directly, conveyed an appealing personal ethos and employed narratives as proof. Reagan's manner also served him well in the second 1984 debate with Walter Mondale, when Reagan's humor helped allay concerns based on his poor performance in the first debate. The Commission on Presidential Debates introduced the Town Hall format in 1992, which proved an ideal match for Bill Clinton's talents. Where his opponents struggled with direct interactions with the audience of undecided voters, Clinton excelled in both manner and content. While Clinton's 1996 debate with Senator Bob Dole is less famous, it reflected the incumbent's oft-asserted penchant for policy and his ability to contrast himself directly with the Republican challenger. The final addresses analyzed are both presidents' first and second inaugural addresses. In both chief executives cases, these are among the most widely known of their speeches and they provided insight into how they spoke to diverse and complex publics.

Study of these discourses yielded four-part orientations to the nature of populism in both presidents' speech habits. Perhaps most interestingly, the presidents shared three of the four components in common. Evaluation of Ronald Reagan's speeches issued "populist speech" in the form of (1) an emphasis on religion or faith, (2) the use of narratives or stories as proofs, (3) appeals to uniquely "American" values, and (4) consistent success in establishing speaker-audience identification. Bill Clinton's oratory paralleled Reagan's on three of these four traits. He, too, revealed an affinity for narrative, grounded his persuasion in a preference for value

appeals—although the particular values evident in the two presidents’ speeches varied—and excelled at gaining a shared sense of purpose through speaker-audience identification. In contrast to Reagan’s emphasis on religion or faith, though, the fourth feature of Clinton’s populism, and perhaps its most important in its influence on the other three, was the centrality of hope and optimism throughout his discourse.

Implications

To this point, the project has described populism and offered two in-depth analyses of the rhetorical practices of Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. These analyses, however, do not yet form a complete picture of populism. Understanding to this point revolves around the ways in which their discourse aligns with the five themes of populism presented earlier in the project. For example, one finding in the Clinton chapter included how the stories he told functioned many times to eschew his elite status and transcend political ideology. These are both themes of populism, but knowing that they interact with a rhetorical staple of Clinton’s does not provide a conclusion on which this study can rest. Until this point, the current chapter has focused only on reviewing what the project has done. The following pages describe how the information revealed about Reagan and Clinton intertwines with the answers sought to the overarching questions about populism established at the outset of the project. Consequently, in this section the two chapters on the 40th and 42nd presidents converge to explore potential lessons about populism.

The similarities of Clinton’s and Reagan’s “populist speaking” may be one of the most compelling findings in this research. The key characteristics of Reagan’s rhetoric were his use of religion, stories, values, and identification tactics. Clinton shared three of these four major features, with the significant difference being that instead of religion he often referenced a particular view about American hope, opportunity, and progress. That is, he talked about the

future being better than the past as he believed that society must improve with the passage of time. This ascribed belief not only differs from religion, but some might say is antithetical to it. Religion is often linked to tradition, and while Clinton does not reject language like this entirely, it is not as prevalent with him as with Reagan. These findings do not negate their differences, however, as even when their rhetorical styles align the populist tendencies, their approaches to values, stories, and identification frequently differed in detail. For instance, although they both used narrative frequently Reagan's stories typically functioned to eschew his elite status and pit the working class against the wealthy or privileged class. Clinton's narratives, on another hand, downplayed his increasingly elite status and sought to transcend political ideology.

Guided by these four themes in each president's discourse, this project assessed which populist tendencies revealed themselves most often and most aggressively. Two of the five most prominent populist themes in each case study were discussed in the respective chapters. To recap: Reagan's use of religious rhetoric often reflected the populist themes of transcending political ideology and anti-ism. His stories eschewed his elite status and pitted the working class against the wealthy. His values reflected vague notions of "the people" while also pitting the working class versus the wealthy, and his identification rhetoric eschewed his elite status and pitted the working class against the wealthy. Clinton's progressive rhetoric as well as his stories often eschewed his elite status and transcended ideology. His values transcended ideology and made references to "the people," while his identification eschewed his elite status and pitted the working class against the wealthy.

Surprising similarities were discovered by using this method as the two most commonly present themes of populism in each man's rhetoric are that they attempted to eschew their elite status and to transcend political ideology. The analysis of the presidents' texts revealed eight

dominant tactics pertinent to populism in the selected speeches of each (two for each piece of conventional wisdom). Three of the eight for Clinton aligned with eschewing the elite, while another three linked to transcending political ideology. The working class versus the wealthy and the idea of the people only presented themselves one time each, and anti-ism was not a central theme in any of Clinton's rhetorical habits. For Reagan eschewing elitism presented itself twice, along with transcending political ideology and the working class versus the wealthy. Anti-ism appeared once, and "the people" did not constitute a dominant theme in any of the Reagan texts studied.

The ideal of representing all citizens in American government, demonstrated throughout the addresses of both Reagan and Clinton, is foundational to populism. Representing the many is reflexively touted as an ultimate good. More than that, it has the tendency to be conveyed as a selfless and virtuous cause for politicians, perhaps even for all citizens, to support. The figure most able to capture the mantle of a "voice of the people" is at a distinct advantage in American politics, given public sentiment for candidates and leaders perceived to be "one of us." Yet, the actions that any elected official takes is highly unlikely to benefit all citizens, since public policy most often provides for varying segments of the population. Populism thus seems to be born not out of helping the people but out of the illusion of being one of the people. Although the working class versus the wealthy, anti-ism and 'the people' were present in each man's rhetorical habits, they did not recur as dominant themes in their populist rhetoric.

The two most important factors in both Reagan's and Clinton's versions populism—downplaying the elite and transcending ideology—lend themselves to a portrayal that may or may not coincide with action. The rhetorical habits of Clinton and Reagan often worked to reflect that they were men who pulled themselves "up from the bootstraps." Even the perception

that they earned their place in society through hard work and perseverance put them on the side of the imagined, generalized audience. Concurrently, it was important to both not to flaunt any wealth or power. Ironically, occupying what has often been called the “most powerful office in the world” may hinge on constructing and sustaining a career (or an image, or both) that belies interest in or possession of power. Reagan and Clinton alike, for instance, frequently sought to unify their interests with the interests of the public by arguing that Congress, a “common enemy,” failed to act in the country’s (e.g., the president and “the people”) best interests.

Transcending ideology operates in a similar way by trying to unify the people around the candidate’s preferred goals. A candidate who uses populist language can speak to a majority of an ideal audience called “the people” because their language can subvert the political leanings of this imagined group. As an example, a politician might say something like “on the issue of [insert any issue here], we need to come together not as Republicans (or Democrats or Libertarians or Independents or . . .) but as Americans, and enact the proposed legislation.” It is entirely possible that the legislation itself will only reflect the beliefs, wishes, needs, values, and so on of select subsets of the U.S. population. However, when articulated by an “inclusive rhetoric” with a foundation in “universal” national ideals, the discourse may evince a unity that aligns with fundamental populist strategy and tactics.

Based on an understanding of how Reagan’s and Clinton’s campaign and presidential speaking, one can see that the basis of their populism rested on being for the people by primarily eschewing their elite statuses and transcending political ideology. It would be misleading, though, to conclude that a complete definition of populism rests on these two variables. Populism might reference these two dimensions more than “anti-ism,” for instance, but the use of anti-tactics to portray a message can still constitute populism at work. As was stated earlier, each of

the five themes presented in the first chapter was found at one point or another in the discourses of Reagan and Clinton. The differences rested with matters of emphasis, frequency, and the particular traits' definitions and applications. Clinton and Reagan alike sought to tap into American value systems, and to do so in ways that created identification with "the people." The specific values each emphasized often differed, though, and impact on the "public good" of the policies grounded in the presidents' value systems favored or hindered different populations.

Based on the findings accessible in each previous chapter, as well as the interpretation above, the answers to the questions that led to this research emerge. The first question that generated the research reported here was: What do people mean when they label a politician a populist? For Reagan and Clinton, the dominant answer is that populist rhetoric downplays or eschews elitism and transcends ideology. It is also the case, however, that the other three variables or themes articulated in chapter one and at the start of this Conclusion were also in play when these presidents campaigned or governed. The evidence revealed that while the first two themes dominated, the discourse of Clinton and/or Reagan exhibited not-infrequent instances of appeals to the working class versus privilege, emphases on "anti-ism," and explicit efforts to call forth the listener's commitment to "the people." That said, a dominant, recurring theme written about populism, here and elsewhere, is that it is ultimately flexible.

In the first chapter of this project, Gary Woodward was used as an example of a scholar who thought that populism had been misused. Indeed, the title of the aforementioned article is "Reagan as Roosevelt: The Elasticity of Pseudo-Populist Appeals."⁵ He reaffirmed the common belief that moving away from the Populist Movement was moving toward something that was *not* populism but only mimicked it, much to the peril of the country. This project has been significantly informed by the idea of an elastic populism introduced by his article. Elasticity

refers to the ability to take back an original form after distortion, and it is evident from the history of populism that there has been a dilatation of it since its agrarian beginning. This evolution, however, is not a misuse. This study has found that the heart of populism is not that it has been co-opted but that it is malleable. The correction that can be made to Woodward's original argument is that all populist appeals share this elasticity, not simply those which he deems 'pseudo'. Populism always has the ability to take on its original use of reform, but it has been so stretched that "the villains of 19th-century Populism have become the beneficiaries of the 20th-century remnants of its style."⁶

The dominant theme of populism's elasticity in this project, first and foremost, has revealed that the term has no one true definition. The claim that the modern populist appeals do not represent *real* populism is akin to grasping to original definitions in the English language. As an example, the word awful used to mean "worthy of awe,"⁷ yet today no one would argue that the term is misused if it were describing a car accident. Although Woodward only attached elasticity to a counterfeit populism, this project has expanded on that notion. The strategic rhetorical choice of using populist language that is present in the presidential rhetoric studied for this project is not a reminder of how its original intents have been lost. Indeed, thinking of what is now called populist as simply an incorrect use of the term is the root of the misunderstanding surrounding it. Reagan and Clinton are not mislabeled as populists, but more thoroughly understood as such. The heart of populism in America is People's Party Movement in Kansas during the nineteenth century, and each of the themes of populism presented here is derived from that fundamental understanding.

With the knowledge that populism is an elastic term that can fulfill different roles, the first question guiding this study is still adequately answered by saying there is not one hard-line

definition. Nonetheless, being elastic is not equivalent to being meaningless. Instead, this finding simply demonstrates that when using the term scholars should be careful not to assume that all readers have the same understanding of populism that the writer does. The word has shifted, and clearly no longer refers solely to the nineteenth century People's Party in Kansas. To say that Ronald Reagan was not a populist because he was not for the people in the way that Huey Long was is to deny all additional aspects of populism. To say that Clinton was a populist and not define his brand of speech is to leave open the possibility that a reader will take him as a trickster with intentions of fooling the American public.

The second question asked in this project can also be answered by reflecting on the research completed. As a reminder, the question was: Is populism an illuminating descriptor? The answer to this question is more complicated than a simple yes or no. Due to the diverse and flexible ways in which writers and speakers use it, populism can both inform and confuse. At the very least populism can be an additional descriptive term. It can add meaningfully to a depiction of many diverse politicians, but it has not revealed itself to be illuminating as a sole descriptor. This does not justify the call for the abandonment of populism as scholars Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser cited in the introduction of this project, however. As a reminder, they stated, "no wonder some authors have called for the abandonment of the use of the allegedly meaningless term."⁸ In contrast to this, the takeaway from this study is that when using the term, a clear explanation of what is meant should always accompany it.

The question may then become, why use the term at all if it must be explained each and every time? The answer goes back to its basis in nineteenth century political reform. The word populism has an affective role on an audience precisely because of the real history that supports it. An author's use of the term, paired with clarification of what is meant by using it, can evoke

this long tradition and increase the persuasive power of an argument. With this understanding in mind, the questions that this project set out to answer have been responded to. Populism can have multiple correct meanings and can be illuminating many different types of study if used properly. Although it should not be used alone to describe a politician's speech habits, the use of it as an additional descriptor can strengthen an argument.

As this project comes to a close, it is appropriate to end with the 2016 election that started it all. Nearly every politician in the race for the Republican and Democratic nominations was described as populist, and now it seems that these descriptions could all be correct. Hillary Clinton is a populist politician. In the article by Scott Beauchamp cited at the outset of the project, he writes about Clinton's awareness of commonalities with the people, adding that she "is [a populist] in a different, and more literal sense: She actually tries to cater to the majority of likely voters"⁹ Donald Trump is also a populist. Or, at least, MJ Lee and Dan Merica at CNN contend that he is when they observe that "Donald Trump has cast himself as a populist hero during the 2016 campaign: A champion of impoverished middle-class Americans shunned by a corrupt political establishment."¹⁰

These examples teach us about not only Clinton and Trump as politicians but also about populism. This is because the authors describe what is meant by the word. In fact, when reading through the articles that began this query, one can see that a pundit rarely uses the label without describing their interpretation of it. At first, their differing descriptions of what populism meant was confusing, but paired with the findings of this project it becomes clear that they were using populism appropriately all along. The comments about both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 election seem to reflect that populism is a powerful term that political commentators already make sure to define. Surely research on Reagan, Clinton, and populism will continue

long after this project. As the parlor conversation Burke described persists, the hope is that it will go on more informed from this project's influence. While populism is a useful term in political speech, its meaning goes beyond any one label.

In chapter one, the comment was made that attempting to determine the cause of the rise of populism globally may be a fruitful area for additional research. The current project is a useful starting point for not only that possible study but many others as well. A significant limitation in this investigation is the lack of empirical evidence about the effects of populist rhetoric on an audience. This could be an area for quantitative research to illuminate further how populism works instead of how political pundits mean it, which is only one arena of its use. Studying the different uses of populism in diverse arenas may be beneficial to rhetorical studies as a whole. There seem to be at least three distinct perspectives through which to look at populists and populism. These include, but may not be limited to: the political pundit's usage, as in naming as populist 2016 candidates for president as diverse as Mike Huckabee, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump; orators' own appeals, particularly when they seek to juxtapose a benevolent "people," however that might be interpreted, to a malevolent "other," no matter how that might be defined; and scholars like Kazin, Woodward, Erlich, and others, who seek to discern in specific case studies patterns of populism that yield usable general theories or principles. Additionally, while attention to Reagan and Clinton informs populism from an historical perspective, its findings may aid future scholars in studying 2016 itself. Populism as a feature of Hillary Clinton vs. Donald Trump in the general election might be well illuminating. So too could research on primary campaign candidates whose appeals more clearly reflected the historical teachings about populism, Sanders and Huckabee prominently, and even Trump in his pursuit of the Republican nomination. In the end, Burke's parlor conversation continues.

Endnotes

¹ Scott Beauchamp, “The Populism of Hillary Clinton,” *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/08/hillary-the-populist/400376/>.

² Mara Liasson, “Nativism and Economic Anxiety Fuel Trump’s Populist Appeal,” *National Public Radio*, September 4, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/09/04/437443401/populist-movement-reflected-in-campaigns-of-sanders-and-trump>.

³ Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Introduction,” in *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*, ed. Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

⁴ Peter Wiles, “A Syndrome Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Thesis on Populism,” in *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, ed. Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969), 171.

⁵ Gary C. Woodward, “Reagan as Roosevelt: The Elasticity of Pseudo-Populist Appeals,” *Central States Speech Journal* 34 (1983).

⁶ Woodward, “Reagan as Roosevelt:” 57.

⁷ TED Guest Author, “20 Words that Once Meant Something Very Different,” *TED*, June 18, 2014, <http://ideas.ted.com/20-words-that-once-meant-something-very-different/>.

⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Introduction,” 1.

⁹ Beauchamp, “The Populism of Hillary Clinton.”

¹⁰ MJ Lee and Dan Merica, “Clinton Look to Pop Trumps Populist Appeal,” *CNN Politics*, May 25, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/05/24/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-populist-housing-crisis/>.

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- Empirical Research Methods – T. Emmers-Sommer
- Classical Sociological Theories – D. Dickens
- Rhetorical-Critical Research Methods – D. Conley
- Theories of Communication – D. Conley
- Survey of Communication Studies – T. McManus
- College Teaching in Communication – W. Belk

Work Experience

- Marketing Capabilities Coordinator, Caesars Entertainment (August 2016 – Present)
- Marketing Assistant, Yelp Las Vegas (June 2016 – Present)
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (August 2014 – June 2016)
- Cocktail Waitress, Riviera Hotel & Casino (May 2014 – August 2014)
- Administrative Assistant, Comedy on Deck Tours (August 2009 – May 2014)
- Sandwich Artist, Subway (July 2008 – August 2009)
- Associate, Baskin Robbins (January 2008 – July 2008)
- Courtesy Clerk, Vons (January 2007 – January 2008)